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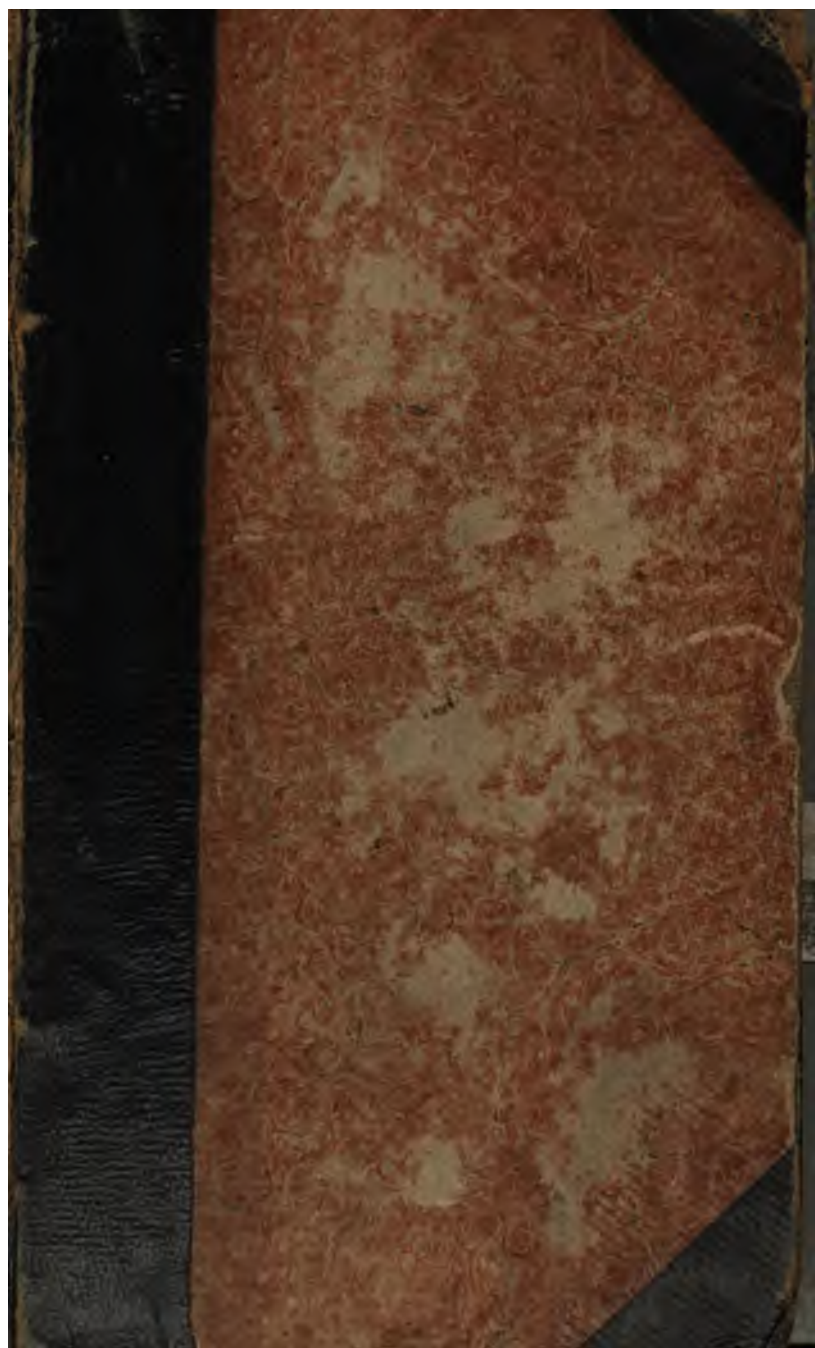
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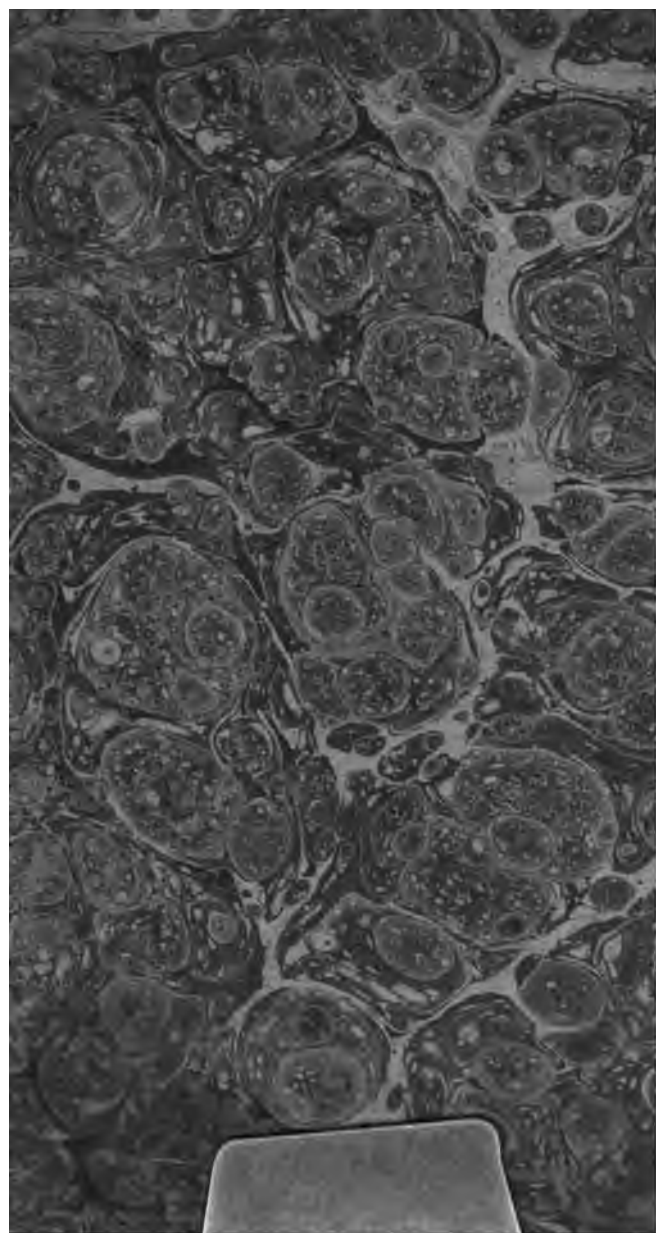
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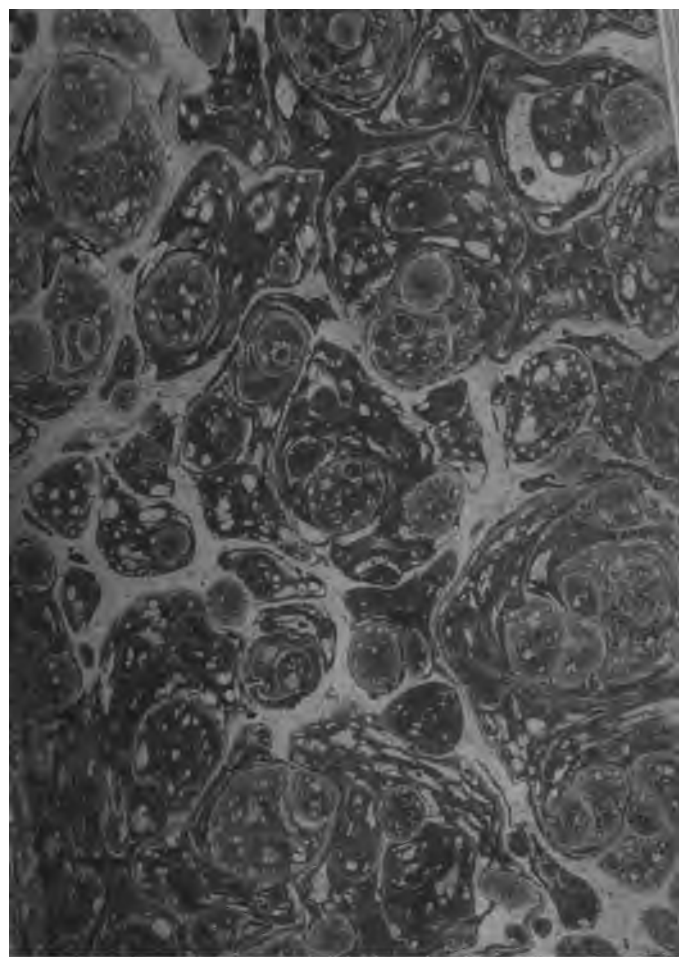
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²⁷ Tho Ward

270 f. 1223

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ESSAYS
IN A
SERIES OF LETTERS
TO A FRIEND,

ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

- I. ON A MAN'S WRITING MEMOIRS OF HIMSELF.**
- II. ON DECISION OF CHARACTER.**
- III. ON THE APPLICATION OF THE EPITHET ROMANTIC.**
- IV. ON SOME OF THE CAUSES BY WHICH EVANGELICAL RELIGION HAS BEEN RENDERED LESS ACCEPTABLE TO PERSONS OF CULTIVATED TASTE.**

BY JOHN FOSTER,

*Inspicere, tanquam in speculum, in vitas omnium
Jubeo, atque ex aliis sumere exemplum sibi.*

Ter.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

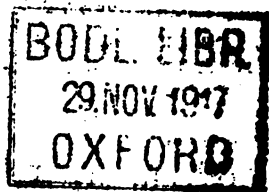
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ADVERTISEMENT.

PERHAPS it will be thought that pieces written so much in the manner of set compositions as the following, should not have been denominated Letters; it may therefore be proper to say, that they are so called because they were actually addressed to a friend. They were written however with the intention to print them, if, when they were finished, the writer could persuade himself that they deserved it; and the character of authors is too well known for any one to be surprised that he *could* persuade himself of this.

When he began these letters, his intention was to confine himself within such limits, that essays on twelve or fifteen subjects might have been comprised in a volume. But he soon found that an interesting subject could not be so fully unfolded as he wished, in such a narrow space.

- It appeared to him that many things which would be excluded, as much belonged to the purpose of the essay as those which would be introduced.

It will not seem a very natural manner of commencing a course of letters to a friend, to enter formally on a subject, in the first sentence. In excuse for this abruptness it may be mentioned, that an introductory letter went before that which appears first in the series; but as it was written in the presumption that a considerable variety of subjects would be treated in the compass of a moderate number of letters, it is omitted, as being less adapted to precede what is executed in a manner so different from the design.

When writing which has occupied a considerable length, and has been interrupted by considerable intervals of time, which is also on very different subjects, and was perhaps meditated under the influence of different circumstances, is at last all read over in one short space, this immediate

succession and close comparison make the writer sensible of some things of which he was not aware in the slow separate stages of his progress. On thus bringing the following essays under one review, the writer perceives some reason to apprehend that the spirit of the third will appear so different from that of the second, as to give an impression of something like inconsistency. The second may seem to represent that a man may effect almost every thing, the third that he can effect scarcely any thing. The writer however persuades himself that the one does not assert the efficacy of human resolution and effort, under the same conditions under which the other asserts their inefficacy; and that therefore there is no real contrariety between the principles of the two essays. Allowing a human agent to possess power within *certain limits*, (though those limits be narrow,) but then asserting his utter imbecility beyond those limits; there will inevitably be a great contrast between the

ESSAY I.

On a Man's writing Memoirs of himself.

LETTER I.

My dear Friend,

EVERY one knows with what interest it is natural to retrace the course of our own lives. The past states and periods of a man's being are retained in a connexion with the present by that principle of self-love, which is unwilling to relinquish its hold on what has once been his. Though he cannot but be sensible of how little consequence his life can have been in the creation, compared with many other trains of events, yet he has felt it more important to himself than all other trains together; and you will very rarely find him tired of narrating again the little history,

or at least the favourite parts of the little history, of himself.

To turn this partiality to some account, I recollect having proposed to two or three of my friends that they should write, each principally however for his own use, memoirs of their own lives, endeavouring not so much to enumerate the mere facts and events of life, as to discriminate the successive states of the mind, and the progress of character. It is in this progress that we acknowledge the chief importance of life to consist; but even as supplying a constant series of interests to the passions, and separately from every consideration of moral and intellectual discipline, we have all accounted our life an inestimable possession, which it deserved incessant cares and labours to retain, and which continues in most cases to be still held with anxious attachment. What has been the object of so much partiality, and has been delighted and pained by so many emotions, might claim, even if the

highest interest were out of the question, that a short memorial should be retained by him who has possessed it, has seen it all to this moment depart, and can never recall it.

To write memoirs of many years, as twenty, thirty, or forty, seems at the first glance a ponderous task. Perhaps to reap the products of so many acres of earth indeed might, to one person, be an undertaking of mighty toil. But the materials of any value that all past life can supply to a recording pen, would be reduced by a discerning selection to a very small and modest amount. How much more than one page of moderate size would be deemed by any man's self-importance to be due, on an average, to each of the days that he has lived? No man would judge more than one in ten thousand of all his thoughts sayings and actions worthy to be mentioned, if memory were capable of recalling them. Neces-

sarily a very large portion of what has occupied the successive years of life was of a kind to be utterly useless for a history of it; because it was merely for the accommodation of the time. Perhaps in the space of forty years, millions of sentences are proper to be uttered, and many thousands of affairs requisite to be transacted, or of journies to be performed, which it would be ridiculous to record. They are a kind of material for the common expenditure and waste of the day. And yet it is often by a detail of this subordinate economy of life, that the works of fiction, the narratives of age, the journals of travellers, and even grave biographical accounts, attain their wonderful length. As well might a chronicle of the coats that a man has worn, with the colour and date of each, be called his life, for any important uses of relating its history. As well might a man of whom I inquire the dimensions the internal divisions and the use of some re-

markable building, begin to tell me how much wood was employed in the scaffolding, where the mortar was prepared, or how often it rained while the work was proceeding.

But, in a deliberate review of all that we can remember of past life, it will be possible to select a certain proportion which may with the most propriety be deemed the history of the man. What I am recommending is to follow the order of time, and reduce your recollections, from the earliest period to the present, into as simple a statement and explanation as you can, of your feelings, opinions, and habits, and of the principal circumstances through each stage that have influenced them, till they have become at last what they now are.

Whatever tendencies nature may justly be deemed to have imparted in the first instance, you would probably find the greater part of the moral constitution of

your being composed of the contributions of many years and events, consolidated by degrees into what we call character ; and by investigating the progress of the accumulation, you would be assisted to judge more clearly how far the materials are valuable, the mixture congruous, and the whole conformation worthy to remain unaltered. With respect to any friend that greatly interests us, we have always a curiosity to obtain an accurate account of the past train of his life and feelings ; and though there may be several reasons for such a wish, it partly springs from a consciousness how much this retrospective knowledge would assist to decide or confirm our estimate of that friend—but our estimate of ourselves is of more serious consequence.


The elapsed periods of life acquire importance too from the prospect of its continuance. The smallest thing becomes respectable, when regarded as the commencement of what has advanced, or is

advancing, into magnificence. The first rude settlement of Romulus would have been an insignificant circumstance, and might justly have sunk into oblivion, if Rome had not at length commanded the world. The little rill, near the source of one of the great American rivers, is an interesting object to the traveller who is apprised, as he steps across it, or walks a few miles along its bank, that this is the stream which runs so far, and which gradually swells into so immense a flood. So, while I anticipate the endless progress of life, and wonder through what unknown scenes it is to take its course, its past years lose that character of vanity which would seem to belong to a train of fleeting perishing moments, and I see them assuming the dignity of a commencing eternity. In them I have *begun* to be that conscious existence which I *am* to be through infinite duration; and I feel a strange emotion of curiosity about this:

little life in which I am setting out on such a progress; I cannot be content without an accurate sketch of the windings thus far of a stream which is to bear me on forever. I try to imagine how it will be to recollect, at a far distant point of my era, what I was when here; and I wish, if it were possible, to retain, as I advance, the whole course of my existence within the scope of clear reflection; to fix in my mind so very strong an idea of what I have been in this original period of my time, that I shall most completely possess this idea in ages too remote for calculation.

The review becomes still more important, when I learn the influence which this first part of the progress will have on the happiness or misery of the next.

One of the greatest difficulties in the way of executing the proposed task will have been caused by the extreme deficiency of that self-observation, which, to any extent, is no common employment



either of youth or any later age. Men realize their existence in the surrounding objects that act upon them, and form the *interests* of self, rather than in that very *self*, that interior being, which is thus acted upon. So that this being itself, with its thoughts and feelings, as distinct from the objects of those thoughts and feelings, but rarely occupies its own deep and patient attention. Men carry their minds as they carry their watches, content to be ignorant of the mechanism of their movements, and satisfied with attending to the little exterior circle of things, to which the passions, like indexes, are pointing. It is surprising to see how little self-knowledge a person not watchfully observant of himself may have gained in the whole course of an active, or even an inquisitive life. He may have lived almost an age, and traversed a continent, minutely examining its curiosities, and interpreting the half-obliterated characters

on its monuments, unconscious the while of a process operating on his own mind to impress or to erase characteristics of much more importance to him than all the figured brass or marble that Europe contains. After having explored many a cavern or dark ruinous avenue, he may have left undetected a darker recess in his character. He may have conversed with many people, in different languages, on numberless subjects ; but, having neglected those conversations with himself by which his whole moral being should have been kept continually disclosed to his view, he is better qualified perhaps to describe the intrigues of a foreign court, or the progress of a foreign trade ; to represent the manners of the Italians, or the Turks ; to narrate the proceedings of the Jesuits, or the adventures of the gypsies ; than to write the history of his own mind.

If we had practised habitual self-observation, we could not have failed to make important discoveries. There have been

thousands of feelings, each of which, if strongly seized upon, and made the subject of reflection, would have shewn us what our character was, and what it was likely to become. There have been numerous incidents, which operated on us as tests, and so fully brought out the whole quality of the mind, that another person, who should have been discriminatively observing us, would instantly have formed a decided estimate. But unfortunately the mind is generally too much occupied by the feeling or the incident itself, to have the slightest care or consciousness that anything *could* be learnt, or *is* disclosed. In very early youth it is almost inevitable for it to be thus lost to itself even amidst its own feelings, and the external objects of attention; but it seems a contemptible thing, and it certainly is a criminal and dangerous thing, for a man in mature life to allow himself this thoughtless escape from self-examination.

We have not only neglected to observe what our feelings indicated, but have also in a very great degree ceased to remember what they were. We may justly wonder how our minds could pass away successively from so many scenes and moments which seemed to us important, each in its time, and retain so slight an impression, that we have now nothing to tell about what once excited our utmost emotion. As to my own mind, I perceive that it is becoming uncertain of the exact nature of many feelings of considerable interest, even of later years; of course, the remembrance of what was felt in early life is exceedingly faint. I have just been observing several children of eight or ten years old, in all the active vivacity which enjoys the plenitude of the moment without "looking before or after;" and while observing, I attempted, but without success, to recollect what I was at that age. I can indeed remember the principal events of the period, and the actions

and projects to which my feelings impelled me; but the feelings themselves, in their own pure juvenility, cannot be revived, so as to be described and placed in comparison with those of maturity. What is become of all those vernal fancies which had so much power to touch the heart? What a number of sentiments have lived and revelled in the soul that are now irrevocably gone. They died, like the singing birds of that time, which now sing no more.

The life that we then had, now seems almost as if it could not have been our own. When we go back to it in thought, and endeavour to recall the interests which animated it, they will not come. We are like a man returning, after the absence of many years, to visit the embowered cottage where he passed the morning of his life, and finding only a relic of its ruins.

But many of the propensities which still continue, probably originated then; and our not being able to explore them

up to those remote sources renders a *complete* investigation of our moral and intellectual characters for ever impossible. How little, in those years, we were aware, when we met with the incident, or heard the conversation, or saw the spectacle, or felt the emotion, which were the first causes of some of the chief permanent tendencies of future life, how much we might, long afterward, wish to ascertain the origin of those tendencies, and how much in vain. But if we cannot absolutely reach their origin, it will however be interesting to trace them back through all the circumstances which have increased their strength.

In some occasional states of the mind, we can look back much more clearly, and to a much greater distance, than at other times. I would advise to seize those short intervals of illumination which sometimes occur without our knowing the cause, and in which the genuine aspect of some remote event, or long-forgotten image,

is recovered with extreme distinctness by vivid spontaneous glimpses of thought, such as no effort could have commanded ; as the sombre features and minute objects of a distant ridge of hills become strikingly visible in the strong gleams of light which transiently fall on them. An instance of this kind occurred to me but a few hours since, while reading what had no perceptible connexion with a circumstance of my early youth, which probably I have not recollected for many years, and which had no unusual interest at the time that it happened. That circumstance came suddenly to my mind with a clearness of representation which I was not able to retain for the length of an hour, and which I could not by the strongest effort at this instant renew. I seemed almost to *see* the walls and windows of a particular room, with four or five persons in it, who were so perfectly restored to my imagination, that I could recognise not only the features, but even

the momentary expressions of their countenances, and the tones of their voices.

According to different states of the mind too, retrospect appears longer or shorter. It may happen that some memorable circumstance of very early life shall be so powerfully recalled as to contract the wide intervening space; by banishing from the view, a little while, all the series of intermediate remembrances; but when this one object of memory retires again to its remoteness and indifference, and all the others resume their proper places and distances, the retrospect appears long.

Places and things which have an association with any of the events or feelings of past life, will greatly assist the recollection of them. A man of strong associations finds memoirs of himself already written on the places where he has conversed with happiness or misery. If an old man wished to animate for a moment the languid and faded ideas which he re-

tains of his youth, he might walk with his crutch across the green where he once played with companions who are now probably laid to repose in another spot not far off. An aged saint may meet again some of the affecting ideas of his early piety in the place where he first thought it happy to pray. A walk in a meadow, the sight of a bank of flowers, perhaps even of some one flower, a landscape with the tints of autumn, the descent into a valley, the brow of a mountain, the house where a friend has been met, or has resided, or has died, have often produced a much more lively recollection of our past feelings, and of the objects and events which caused them, than the most perfect description could have done; and we have lingered a considerable time for the pensive luxury of thus resuming, if I may so express it, the departed state of our minds.

But there are many to whom local associations present images which they fervently wish they could forget; images

which haunt the places where crimes have been perpetrated, and which seem to approach and glare on the criminal as he hastily passes by, especially if in the evening or the night. No local associations are so impressive as those of guilt. It may here be observed, that as each one has his own separate remembrances, giving to some places an aspect and a significance which he alone can perceive, there must be an unknown number of pleasing, or mournful, or dreadful associations, spread over the scenes inhabited or visited by men. *We* pass without any awakened consciousness by the bridge, or the wood, or the house, where there is something to excite the most painful or frightful ideas in the next man that shall come that way, or possibly the companion that walks along with us. How much there is in a thousand spots of the earth, that is invisible and silent to all but the conscious individual.

I hear a voice you cannot hear,
I see a hand you cannot see.

LETTER II.

WE may regard our past life as a continued though irregular course of education ; and the discipline has consisted of instruction, companionship, reading, and the diversified influences of the world. The young mind eagerly came forward to meet the operation of some of these modes of discipline, though without the possibility of a thought concerning the important process under which it was beginning to pass. In some certain degree we have been influenced by each of these parts of the great system of education ; it will be worth while to inquire how far, and in what manner.

Few persons can look back to the early period when they were peculiarly the subjects of instruction, without a regret for themselves, (which may be extended to the human race,) that the result of in-

struction, excepting that which leads to evil, bears so small a proportion to its compass and repetition. Yet *some* good consequence will follow the diligent inculcation of truth and precept on the youthful mind ; and our consciousness of possessing certain advantages derived from it will be a partial consolation in the review that will comprise so many proofs of its comparative inefficacy. You can recollect perhaps the instructions to which you feel yourself permanently the most indebted, and some of those which produced the greatest effect on your mind at the time, those which surprised, delighted, or mortified you. You can remember the facility or difficulty of understanding, the facility or difficulty of believing, and the practical inferences which you drew from principles, on the strength of your own reason, and sometimes in variance with those made by your instructors. You can remember what views of truth and duty were most frequently and cogently pre-

sented, what passions were appealed to, what arguments were employed, and which had the greatest influence. Perhaps your present idea of the most convincing and persuasive mode of instruction may be derived from your early experience of the manner of those persons, with whose opinions you felt it the most easy and delightful to harmonize, who gave you the most agreeable consciousness of your faculties expanding to the light, like morning flowers, and who, assuming the least of dictation, exerted the greatest degree of power. You can recollect the submissiveness with which your mind yielded to instructions as from an oracle, or the hardihood with which you dared to examine and oppose them. You can remember how far they became, as to your own conduct, an internal authority of reason and conscience, when you were not under the inspection of those who inculcated them ; and what classes of persons or things around you they induced you to dislike or approve. And you can perhaps

imperfectly trace the manner and the particulars in which they sometimes aided, or sometimes counteracted, those other influences which have a far stronger efficacy on the character than instruction can boast.

Most persons, I presume, can recollect some few sentences or conversations which made so deep an impression, perhaps in some instances they can scarcely tell why, that they have been thousands of times recalled, while all the rest have been forgotten; or they can advert to some striking incident, coming in aid of instruction, or being of itself a forcible instruction, which they seem even now to see as clearly as when it happened, and of which they will retain a perfect idea to the end of life. The most remarkable circumstances of this kind deserve to be recorded in the supposed memoirs. In some instances, to recollect the instructions of a former period will be to recollect too the excellence, the affection, and the death, of the persons who gave them. Amidst the sadness of such a

remembrance, it will be a consolation that they are not entirely lost to us. Wise monitions, when they return on us with this melancholy charm, have more pathetic cogency than when they were first uttered by the voice of a living friend who is now silent. It will be an interesting occupation of the pensive hour, to recount the advantages which we have received from beings who have left the world, and to reinforce our virtues from the dust of those who first taught them.

In our review, we shall find that the companions of our childhood, and of each succeeding period, have had a great influence on our characters. A creature so conformable as man, and at the same time so capable of being moulded into partial dissimilarity by social antipathies, cannot have conversed with his fellow beings thousands of hours, walked with them thousands of miles, undertaken with them numberless enterprises smaller and greater, and had every passion by turns awakened in their

company, without being immensely affected by all this association. A large share indeed of the social interest may have been of so common a kind, and with persons of so common an order, that the effect on the character has been too little peculiar to be strikingly perceptible during the progress. We were not sensible of it, till we came to some of those circumstances and changes in life, which make us aware of the state of our minds by the manner in which new objects are acceptable or repulsive to them. On removing into a new circle of society, for instance, we could perceive, by the number of things in which we found ourselves uncongenial with the new acquaintance, the modification which our sentiments had received in the preceding social intercourse. But in some instances we have been sensible, in a very short time, of a powerful force operating on our opinions tastes and habits, and throwing them into a new order. This effect is inevitable, if a young susceptible mind happens to become

familiarly acquainted with a person in whom a strongly individual cast of character is sustained and dignified by uncommon mental resources; and it may be found that, generally, the greatest measure of effect has been produced by the influence of a very small number of persons; often of one only, whose extended and interesting mind had more power to surround and assimilate a young ingenuous being, than the collective influence of a multitude of the persons, whose characters were moulded in the manufactory of custom, and sent forth like images of clay of kindred shape and varnish from a pottery. I am supposing, all along, that the person who writes memoirs of himself, is conscious of something more peculiar than a mere dull resemblance of that ordinary form of character, for which it would seem hardly worth while to have been a man. As to the crowd of those who are faithfully stamped, like bank-notes, with the

same marks, with the difference only of being worth more guineas or fewer, they are mere particles of a class, mere pieces and bits of the great vulgar or the small; *they* need not write their history, it may be found in the newspaper-chronicle, or the gossip's or the sexton's narrative.

It is obvious, in what I have suggested respecting the research through past life, that all the persons who are recalled to the mind, as having had an influence on us, must stand before it in judgment. It is impossible to examine our moral and intellectual growth without forming an estimate, as we proceed, of those who retarded, advanced, or perverted it. Our dearest relatives and friends cannot be exempted. There will be occasionally the necessity of blaming where we wish to give entire praise; though perhaps some worthy motives and generous feelings may, at the same time, be discovered in the conduct where they had hardly been perceived or allowed before. But, at any

rate, it is important that in no instance the judgment be duped into delusive estimates, amidst the examination, and so as to deprave the principles of the examination by which we mean to bring ourselves to rigorous justice. For if any indulgent partiality, or mistaken idea of that duty which requires a kind and candid feeling to accompany the clearest discernment of defects, may be permitted to beguile our judgments out of the decisions of justice in favour of others, self-love, a more indulgent and partial feeling than all besides, will not fail to practise the same beguilement in favour of ourselves. But indeed it would seem impossible, besides being absurd, to apply one set of principles to judge of ourselves, and another to judge of those with whom we have associated.

Every person of tolerable education has been considerably influenced by the books which he has read ; and remembers with a

kind of gratitude several of those that made the earliest and the strongest impression. It is pleasing at a more advanced period to look into the early favourites again; though the mature person may wonder how some of them had once power to absorb his passions, make him retire into a lonely wood in order to read unmolested, repel the approaches of sleep, or infect it with visions when it came. A capital part of the proposed task would be to recollect the books that have been read with the greatest interest, the periods when they were read, the succession of them, the partiality which any of them inspired to a particular mode of life, to a study, to a system of opinions, or to a class of human characters, and the counteraction of later ones (where we have been sensible of it) to the effect produced by the former; and then, to endeavour to estimate the whole and ultimate influence.

Considering the multitude of facts, sentiments, and characters, which have been

Contemplated by a person who has read much, the effect, one should think, must have been very great. Still however it is probable that a very small number of books will have the pre-eminence in our mental history. Perhaps your memory will promptly recur to six or ten that have contributed more to your present habits of feeling and thought than all the rest together. And here it may be observed, that when a few books of the same kind have pleased us emphatically, they too often form an almost exclusive taste, which is carried through all future reading, and is pleased only with books of that kind.

It might be supposed that the scenes of nature, an amazing assemblage of phænomena, if their effect were not lost through familiarity, would have a powerful influence on all opening minds, and transfuse into the internal economy of ideas and sentiment something of a cha-

racter and a colour correspondent to the beauty, vicissitude, and grandeur, which continually press on the senses. On minds of genius they often have this effect; and Beattie's Minstrel may be as just as it is a fascinating description of the feelings of such a mind. But on the greatest number this influence operates feebly; you will not see the process in children, nor the result in mature persons. The charms of nature are objects only of sight and hearing, not of sensibility and imagination. And even the sight and hearing do not receive impressions sufficiently distinct or forcible for clear recollection; it is not therefore strange that these impressions seldom go so much deeper than the senses as to awaken pensiveness or enthusiasm, and fill the mind with an interior permanent scenery of beautiful images at its own command. This defect of fancy and sensibility is unfortunate amidst a creation infinitely rich with grand and beautiful objects, which,

imparting something more than images to a mind adapted and habituated to converse with nature, inspire an exquisite sentiment that seems like the emanation of a spirit residing in them. It is unfortunate, I have thought within these few minutes, while looking out on one of the most enchanting nights of the most interesting season of the year, and hearing the voices of a company of persons, to whom I can perceive that this soft and solemn shade over the earth, the calm sky, the beautiful stripes of cloud, the stars, and the waning moon just risen, are all blank and indifferent. I feel no vanity in this instance; for probably several thousand aspects of night, not less striking than this, have appeared before my eyes and departed; not only without awaking emotion, but without attracting notice.

If minds in general are not made to be strongly affected by the phænomena of the earth and heavens, they are however

all subject to be powerfully influenced by the appearances and character of the *human* world. I suppose a child in Switzerland, growing up to a man, would have acquired incomparably more of the cast of his mind from the events, manners, and actions, of the next village, though its inhabitants were but his occasional companions, than from all the mountain-scenes, the cataracts, and every circumstance of beauty or sublimity in nature around him. We are all true to our species, and very soon feel its importance to us, (though benevolence be not the basis of the interest,) far beyond the importance of any thing that we see besides. You may have observed how instantly even children will turn their attention away from any of the more ample aspects of nature, however rare or striking, if human objects present themselves to view in any active manner. This "leaning to our kind" brings each individual not only under the influence attending direct companionship with a

few, but under the operation of numberless influences from all the moral diversities of which he is a spectator in the living world,—a complicated though often insensible tyranny, of which every fashion, folly, and vice, may exercise its part.

Some persons would be able, in the review of life, to recollect very strong and influential impressions made, even in almost the first years of it, by some of the facts which they witnessed in surrounding society. I do not know whether you can ; but at least you can retrace your most remarkable views of mankind for a considerable number of years, which have extended your attention beyond the confined population of a neighbourhood, and have given you such access to the wider living world, as to enable you to form your opinions of it from the actual reality, without the aid of moralists, satirists, or writers of novels. And this simple circumstance, that in viewing mankind you have

been led to the adoption of many of your opinions, is one illustration of the influence which the world has had on you ; it has been so far the creator of your mental economy. But the operation has not stopped here ; the living world will not confine itself to occupying the understanding, and yield to be a mere subject for judgments to be formed upon ; but all the while that its judge is directing upon it the exercise of his understanding, it is re-actively throwing on him various moral influences and infections.

LETTER III.

A PERSON, capable of being deeply interested, and who is accustomed to reflect on his feelings, will have observed in himself this subjection to the influences of what has been presented to him in society ;

and will acknowledge that in one or a few instances they have seemed, at the time, of sufficient force to go far toward new-moulding the whole habit of the mind. Recollect your own experience. After witnessing some remarkable transaction, or some new and strange department of life and manners, or some striking disclosure of character, or after listening to some extraordinary conversation, or impressive recital of facts, you have been conscious that what you have heard or seen has given your mind some one strong determination, of a nature directly resulting from the quality of this cause. Though the dispositions already existing must no doubt have been prepared to receive the operation of this new cause in one certain manner, (since every one would not have been affected in the same manner,) yet the feelings have been thrown into an order so different, that you seemed to have acquired a new moral being. The

difference has been not merely in their temporary energy, but also in their direction. In the state thus suddenly formed, some of the dispositions of which you had been conscious before, seemed to be lost, while others that previously had little strength, were grown into an imperious prevalence; or even a new one appeared to have been originated*. While this state continues, a person is another character; and if the moral tendency thus excited or created were prolonged through the sequel of his life, the latter part of it might so little resemble the former, that he would not, except by his person, or by local circumstances, be recognised for the same, while an observer who should not know the cause, would be perplexed and surprised at the difference. Now this difference might actually be in a great measure realized, if the impression which gives this

* So great an effect however as this is perhaps rarely experienced from even the most powerful causes, except in early life.

temporary direction to his mind, were so intensely powerful as to haunt him ever after ; or if he were subjected to a long succession of impressions of the same tendency, without any opposite or strongly different ones intervening to break the process.

You have witnessed perhaps a scene of injustice and oppression, and have retired with an indignation which has tempted you to imprecate vengeance. Now supposing that the hateful image of this scene were to be revived in your mind for a long time, as often as any iniquitous circumstance in society presents itself to your notice, and that you had an entire persuasion that your feeling was the pure indignation of virtue ; or, supposing that you were repeatedly to witness similar instances, without your emotion becoming languid by familiarity with them, the consequence might be that you would acquire the spirit of Draco or Minos.

It is easy to imagine the impression of a

few atrocious facts on a mind of ardent passions converting a humane horror of cruelty into the vindictive fanaticism of Montbar the Buccaneer*; and I have known instances of a similar effect, in a fainter degree. A person of gentler sensibility, by accidentally witnessing a scene of distress of which none of the circumstances caused disgust toward the sufferers, or indignation against others as the cause of the sorrow, having once tasted the pleasure of soothing woes which perhaps death alone can remove, might be led to seek other instances of distress, acquire both an aptitude and a partiality for the friendly office, and become a pensive philanthropist. The strong disgust, excited by some extravagance of ostentatious wealth, or some excess of dissipated frivolity, and awaked again at every succeeding and inferior instance of the same kind, with a much stronger aversion than would have been excited in these inferior instances, if

* See Abbé Raynal's History of the Indies.

the disgusted feeling did not run into the vestiges of the first indelible impression, may produce a cynic or a miser, a recluse or a philosopher. Numberless other illustrations might be brought to shew how much the characters of human beings, entering on life, with such unwarned carelessness of heart, are at the mercy of the incalculable influences which may strike them from any point of the surrounding world.

It is true that, notwithstanding so many influences are acting on men, and some of them apparently of a kind and of a force to produce in their subjects a striking peculiarity, very few characters strongly marked from all around them are found to arise. In looking on a large company of persons whose dispositions and pursuits are substantially alike, we cannot doubt that several of them have met with circumstances, of which the natural tendency must have been to give them a determination of mind extremely dissimilar to the character

those original principles which are to be unfolded by the progress of time into intellectual powers and moral dispositions; I yet cannot but perceive that the *immediate* causes of the greater portion of the prominent *actual* character of human beings are to be found in those moral elements through which they pass. And if I might indulge so fanciful an idea as that of its being possible for a man to live back again to his infancy, through all the scenes of his life, and to give back from his mind and character, at each time and circumstance, as he repassed it, exactly that which he took from it, when he was there before, it would be most curious to see the fragments and *exuviae* of the moral man, lying here and there along the retrograde path, and to find what he was in the beginning of this train of modifications and acquisitions. Nor can it be doubted that any man, though his original tendencies (which possibly have been brought under a series of events calculated to fa-

your their developement) were ever so defined, might, by being led through a different train, opposite to those native tendencies, have been now an extremely different man from what he is, even the measure of his intellectual cultivation being the same.

Here a person even of your age might pause, and look back with great interest on the world of circumstances through which life has been drawn. Consider what thousands of situations, appearances, incidents, persons, you have been present to, each in its moment. The review will present to you something like a chaos, with all the moral, and all other elements, confounded together; and you may reflect till you begin almost to wonder how an individual retains even the same essence through all the diversities, vicissitudes, and counteractions of influence, that operate on it during its progress through the confusion. But though its essence is the same, and might defy an universe to extinguish,

absorb, or change it; its modification, its condition, and habits, will shew where it has been, and what it has undergone. You may descry on it the marks and colours of many of the things by which, in passing, it has been touched or arrested.

Consider the number of meetings with acquaintance, friends, or strangers; the number of conversations you have held or heard; the number of exhibitions of good or evil, virtue or vice; the number of occasions on which you have been disgusted or pleased, moved to admiration or to abhorrence; the number of times that you have contemplated the town, the rural cottage, or verdant fields; the number of volumes that you have read; the times that you have looked over the present state of the world, or gone by means of history into past ages; the number of comparisons of yourself with other persons, alive or dead, and comparisons of them with one another; the number of solitary musings, of solemn contempla-

tions of night, of the successive subjects of thought, and of animated sentiments that have been kindled and extinguished. Add all the hours and causes of sorrow that you have known. Through this lengthened, and, if the number could be told, stupendous, multiplicity of things, you have advanced, while all their heterogeneous myriads have darted influences upon you, each one of them having some definable tendency. A traveller round the globe would not meet a greater variety of seasons, prospects, and winds, than you might have recorded of the circumstances affecting the progress of your character, in your moral journey. You could not wish to have drawn to yourself the agency of a vaster diversity of causes; you could not wish, on the supposition that you had gained advantage from all these, to wear the spoils of a greater number of regions. The formation of the character from so many materials reminds one of that mighty appropriating attraction,

which, on the hypothesis that the resurrection shall re-assemble the same particles which composed the body before, will draw them from dust, and trees, and animals, and ocean, and winds.

It would scarcely be expected that a being which should be conducted through such anarchy of discipline, in which the endless crowd of influential powers seem waiting, each to take away what the last had given, should be permitted to acquire, or to retain, any settled form of qualities at all. The more probable result would be, either several qualities disagreeing with one another, or a blank neutrality. And in fact, a great number of such neutralities are found every where; persons who, unless, as I have before observed, their sharing of the general properties of human nature, a little modified by the insignificant distinction of some large class, can be called character, have no character. It is therefore somewhat strange, if you and if other individuals have come forth with


moral features of a strongly marked and consistently combined cast, from the infinity of miscellaneous impressions. If the process has been so complex, how comes the result to be so simple? How has it happened that the *collective* effect of these numerous and jarring operations on your mind, is that which only a *few* of these operations were adapted to produce, and quite different from that which many others of them would naturally have produced, and do actually produce in many other persons? Here you will perceive that some one capital determination must long since have been by some means established in your mind, and that, during your progress, this grand determination has kept you susceptible of the effect of some influences, and in a great measure fortified against many others. Now what was the prevailing determination, whence did it come, how did it acquire its power? Was it an original tendency and insuppressible impulse of your nature; or the

result of your earliest impressions; or of some one class of impressions repeated oftener than any other; or of one single impression of extreme force? What was it, and whence did it come? This is the great secret in the history of character; for, it is scarcely necessary to observe, that as soon as the mind is under the power of a predominant tendency, the difficulty of growing into the maturity of that form of character which this tendency promotes or creates, is substantially over. Because, when a determining principle is become predominant, it not only produces a partial insensibility to all impressions that would counteract it, but also continually augments its own ascendancy, by means of a faculty or fatality of finding out every thing, and attracting and meeting every impression, that is adapted to coalesce with it and strengthen it; like the instinct of animals which instantly selects from the greatest variety of substances those which are fit for their nutriment. Let a man have

some leading and decided propensity, and it will be surprising to see how many more things he will find, and how many more events will happen, than any one could have imagined, of a nature to reinforce it. And sometimes even circumstances which seemed of an entirely counteractive order, are strangely seduced by this predominant principle into an operation that confirms it; just in the same manner as polemics most self-complacently avow their opinions to be more firmly established by all that the opponent has objected.

It would be easy to enlarge almost without end on the influences of the surrounding world in forming the character of each individual; and no one would deny that to a considerable extent such a representation is true. But yet a man may be unwilling to allow that he has been quite so servilely passive as he would probably find that he has been, if it were

possible for him to make a complete examination. He may be disposed to think that his reason has been an independent power, has kept a strict watch and passed a right judgment on his moral progress, has met the circumstances of the external world on terms of examination and authority, and has *permitted* only such impressions to be received, or at least only such consequences to follow from them, as it wisely approved. But I would tell him that he has been a very extraordinary man, if the greater part of his time has not been spent entirely without a thought of reflecting *what* impressions were made on him, and what was their tendency; and even without a consciousness that the effect of any impressions was of importance to his moral habits. He may be assured that he has been subjected to many gentle gradual processes, and has met many critical occasions, on which, and on the consequences of which, he formed no opinions. And again, it is unfortunately true, that



even should attention be awake, and opinions be formed, the faculty which forms them is very servile to the other parts of the human constitution. If it could be extrinsic to the man, a kind of domestic Pythia, or an attendant genius, like the demon of Socrates, it might then be a dignified regulator of the influences which are acting on his character, to decide what should not affect him, what should affect him, and in what way; though even then, its disapproving dictates would often be inefficacious against the powerful impressions which create an impulse in the mind, and the repetition of them which confirms that impulse into a habit. But the case is, that this faculty, though mocked with imperial names, being condemned to dwell in the mind in the company of far more active powers than itself and earlier exercised, becomes humbly obsequious to them. The passions easily beguile this majestic reason into neglect, or bribe it

into acquiescence, or repress it into silence, while *they* receive the impressions, and while *they* acquire from those impressions that determinate direction which will constitute the character. If, after thus much is done during the weakness, or without the notice, or without the leave, or under the connivance or corruption of the judgment, it be called upon to perform its part, it must act under the full established influence of those very impressions of which its office was to have previously decided whether they should not be strenuously repelled. Thus its opinions will unconsciously be perverted; like the answers of the ancient oracles, dictated to the imaginary god by beings of a very terrestrial sort, though the sly intervention could not be perceived. It is quite a vulgar observation in what a wonderfully favourable manner each man sincerely thinks of the principal features of his own character, though *you* laugh at the gravity of his persuasion that his tastes,

preferences, and qualities, have on the whole grown up under the sacred and faithful guardianship of judgment, while in fact his judgment has accepted every bribe that has been offered to betray him.

LETTER IV.

YOU will agree with me, I believe, that in a comprehensive view of the influences which have formed, and are forming, the characters of men, we shall find, religion excepted, but little cause to felicitate our species. Make the supposition that any given number of persons, a hundred for instance, taken promiscuously, should be able to write memoirs of themselves so clear and perfect as to explain, to your discernment at least, if not to their own consciousness, the entire process by which

their minds have attained their present state, recounting all the most impressive circumstances. If they should read these memoirs to you in succession, while your benevolence, and the moral principles according to which you felt and estimated, were kept at the highest pitch, you would often during the disclosure regret to observe how many things may be the causes of irretrievable mischief. Why is the path of life, you would say, so haunted as if with evil spirits of every diversity of noxious agency, some of which may patiently accompany, or others of which may suddenly cross, the unfortunate wanderer? And you would regret to observe into how many forms of intellectual and moral perversion the human mind readily yields itself to be modified.

As *one* of the number concluded the account of himself, you might be impelled to say, I compassionate you; I perceive the process under which you have become a misanthropist. If your juvenile ingenu-

ous ardour had not been chilled on your entrance into society, where your most favourite sentiments were not at all comprehended by some, and by others deemed wise and proper enough—perhaps for the moon; if you had not felt the mortification of relatives being uncongenial, of persons whom you were anxious to render happy being indifferent to your kindness, or of apparent friendships proving treacherous or transitory; if you had not met with such striking instances of hopeless stupidity in the vulgar, or of vain self-importance in the learned, or of the coarse or supercilious arrogance of the persons whose manners were always regulated by the consideration of the number of guineas by which they were better than you; if your mortifications had not given you a keen faculty of perceiving the all-pervading selfishness of mankind, while, in addition, you had perhaps a peculiar opportunity to observe the apparatus of sys-


tematic villainy by which combinations of men are able to arm their selfishness to oppress or ravage the world—you might even now perhaps have been the persuasive instructor of beings, concerning whom you are wondering why they should have been made in the form of rationals; you might have conciliated to yourself and to goodness, where you repel and are repelled; you might have been the apostle and pattern of benevolence, instead of the grim solitaire. Yet not that the world should bear all the blame. Frail and changeable in virtue, you *might* perhaps have been good under a series of auspicious circumstances; but the glory had been to be victoriously good against malignant ones. Moses lost none of his generous concern for a people, on whom *you* would have invoked the waters of Noah or the fires of Sodom to return; and that Greater than Moses, who endured from men such a matchless excess of injustice, while for their sake alone he sojourned and

suffered on earth, was not alienated to live a misanthropist, nor to die one.

A *second* sketch might exhibit external circumstances not producing any effect more serious than an intellectual stagnation. When it was concluded, you might be tempted to say, If I did not know that mental freedom is a dangerous thing in situations where the possessor would feel it a *singular* attainment; and if I did not prefer even the quiescence of unexamining belief, where the *effects* are pure, to the indifference or scepticism which feels no assurance or no importance in any belief, or to the weak presumption that darts into the newest and most daring opinions as *therefore* true—I should deplore that your life was destined to preserve its sedate course so entirely unanimated by the intellectual novelties of the age, the restless agitations of ever-moving opinion, and under the habitual and exclusive influence of one individual, worthy perhaps, and in a certain degree

sensible, but of unenlarged views, whom you have been taught and accustomed to regard as the comprehensive repository of all the truth requisite for you to know, and from whom you have derived, as some of your chief acquisitions, an assurance of the labour of inquiry being needless, and a superstitious horror of innovation, without even knowing what points are threatened by it.

At the end of *another's* disclosure, you would say, How unfortunate that you could not believe there might be respectable and valuable men, that were not born to be wits or poets. And how unfortunate were those first evenings that you were privileged to listen to a company of men, who could *say* more fine things in an hour than their biographers will be able, without a little panegyric fiction, to record them to have *done* in the whole space of life. It was then you discovered that *you* too were of the progeny of Apollo, and that you had been iniquitously transferred



at your nativity into the hands of ignorant foster-parents, who had endeavoured to degrade and confine you to the sphere of regular employments and sober satisfactions. But you would "tower up to the region of your sire." You saw what wonderful things *might* be said on all subjects; you found it not so very difficult to say *different* things from other people; and every thing that was not common dulness, was therefore pointed, every thing that was not vulgar sense, was therefore sublime. You adopted a certain vastitude of phrase, mistaking extravagance of expression for greatness of thought. You set yourself to dogmatize on books, and the abilities of men, but especially on their prejudices; and perhaps to demolish, with the air of an exploit, some of the trite observations and maxims current in society. You awakened and surprised your imagination by imposing on it a strange new tax of colours and metaphors; a tax

reluctantly and uncouthly paid, but perhaps in some one instance so luckily, as to gain the applause of these gifted (if they were not merely eccentric) men. This was to you the proof and recognition of fraternity ; and it has since been the chief question that has interested you with each acquaintance and in each company, whether they too could perceive what you were so happy to have discovered, yet so anxious that the acknowledgment of others should confirm ; your own persuasion however became as pertinacious as ivy climbing a wall. It was almost of course to attend to necessary pursuits with reluctant irregularity, though suffering by the consequences of neglecting them, and to feel indignant that *genius* should be reproached for the disregard of these ordinary duties to which it ought never to have been subjected.

During a *projector's* story of life and misfortunes, you might regret that he should ever have heard of Harrison's time-

piece, the perpetual motion, or the Greek fire.

After an *antiquarian's* history, you might be allowed to congratulate yourself on not having fallen under the spell which confines a human soul to inhabit, like a spider in one of the corners, a dusty room consecrated with religious solemnity to old coins, rusty knives, illuminated mass-books, swords and spurs of forgotten kings and slippers of their queens, with perhaps a Roman helmet, the acquisition of which was the first cause of the collection and of the passion, elevated imperially over the relics of kings and queens and the whole museum, as the eagle once waved over kingdoms and the world. And you might be inclined to say, I wish that helmet had been a pan for charcoal or cinders, or had been put on the head of one of the quiet equestrian warriors in the Tower, or had aided the hauntings and rattlings of the ghost of Sir Godfrey in the baron's castle where he was murdered.

or had been worn by Don Quixote instead of the barber's bason, or had been the cauldron of Macbeth's witches, or had been in any other shape place or use; rather than dug up an antiquity in a luckless hour in a bank near your garden.

I compassionate you, would, in a *very* benevolent hour, be again your language to the wealthy unfeeling *tyrant of a family and a neighbourhood*, who seeks, in the overawed timidity and unretaliated injuries of the unfortunate beings within his power, the gratification that should have been sought in their affections. Unless you had brought into the world some extraordinary refractoriness to the influence of evil, the process that you have undergone could not easily fail of being efficacious. If your parents idolized their own importance in their son so much that they never opposed your inclinations themselves, nor permitted it to be done by any subject to their authority; if the humble companion, sometimes summoned to the

honour of amusing you, bore your caprices and insolence with the meekness without which he had lost his enviable privilege; if you could despoil the garden of some harmless dependent neighbour of the carefully reared flowers, and torment his little dog or cat, without his daring to punish you or to appeal to your infatuated parents; if aged men addressed you in a submissive tone, and with the appellation of "Sir," and their aged wives uttered their wonder at your condescension, and pushed their grandchildren away from around the fire for your sake, if you happened, though with the strut of pertness, and your hat on your head, to enter one of their cottages, perhaps to express your contempt of the homely dwelling, furniture, and fare; if, in maturer life, you associated with vile persons who would forego the contest of equality, to be your allies in trampling on inferiors; and if, both then and since, you have been suffered to deem your wealth the compendium or

equivalent of every ability and every good quality—it would indeed be immensely strange, if you had not become, in due time, the miscreant, who may thank the power of the laws in civilized society, that he is not assaulted by clubs and stones; to whom one could cordially wish the opportunity and the consequences of attempting his tyranny among some such people as those *submissive* sons of nature in the forests of North America; and whose dependents and domestic relatives may be almost forgiven when they shall one day rejoice at his funeral.

LETTER V.

I WILL imagine only one case more, on which you would emphatically express your compassion, though for one of the most daring beings in the creation, a *con-*

temner of God, who explodes his laws by denying his existence.

If you were so unacquainted with mankind, that this character might be announced to you as a rare or singular phenomenon, your conjectures, till you saw and heard the man, at the nature and the extent of the discipline through which he must have advanced, would be led toward something extraordinary. And you might think that the term of that discipline must have been very long; since a quick train of impressions, a short series of mental gradations, within the little space of a few months and years, would not seem enough to have matured such supreme and awful heroism. Surely the creature that thus lifts his voice, and defies all invisible power within the possibilities of infinity, challenging whatever unknown being may hear him, and may appropriate that title of Almighty which is pronounced in scorn, to evince his existence, if he will, by his vengeance, was

not as yesterday a little child, that would tremble and cry at the approach of a diminutive reptile.

But indeed it is heroism no longer, if he *knows* that there is no God. The wonder then turns on the great process, by which a man could grow to the immense intelligence that can know that there is no God. What ages and what lights are requisite for *THIS* attainment ! This intelligence involves the very attributes of Divinity, while a God is denied. For unless this man is omnipresent, unless he is at this moment in every place in the universe, he cannot know but there may be in some place manifestations of a Deity by which even *he* would be overpowered. If he does not know absolutely every agent in the universe, the one that he does not know may be God. If he is not himself the chief agent in the universe, and does not know what is so, that which is so may be God. If he is not in absolute possession of all the propositions that constitute

universal truth, the one which he wants may be, that there is a God. If he cannot with certainty assign the cause of all that he perceives to exist, that cause may be a God. If he does not know every thing that has been done in the immeasurable ages that are past, some things may have been done by a God. Thus, unless he knows all things, that is, precludes another Deity, by being one himself, he cannot know that the Being whose existence he rejects, does not exist. But he must *know* that he does not exist, else he deserves equal contempt and compassion for the temerity with which he firmly avows his rejection and acts accordingly. And yet a man of *ordinary* age and intelligence may present himself to you with the avowal of being thus distinguished from the crowd; and if he would describe the manner in which he has attained this eminence, you would feel a melancholy interest in contemplating that process of which the result is so portentous.

If you did not know that there are more than a few such examples, you would say, in viewing this result, I *should* hope this is the consequence of some malignant intervention so occasional that ages may pass away before it return among men ; some peculiar conjunction of disastrous influences must have lighted on your selected soul ; you have been struck by that energy of evil which acted upon the spirits of Pharaoh and Epiphanes. But give your own description of what you have met with in a world which has been deemed to present in every part the indications of a Deity. Tell of the mysterious voices which have spoken to you from the deeps of the creation, falsifying the expressions marked on its face. Tell of the new ideas which, like meteors passing over the solitary wanderer, gave you the first glimpses of truth while benighted in the common belief of the divine existence. Describe the whole train of causes that have operated to create and consolidate that state

of mind, which you carry forward to the great experiment of futurity under a different kind of hazard from all other classes of men.

You would find however that those circumstances, by which even a man who had been presented from his infancy with the ideas of religion, could be elated into a contempt of its great object, were far from being extraordinary. They might have been met by any man, whose mind had been cultivated and exercised enough to feel interested about holding any system of opinions at all, whose pride had been gratified in the consciousness of having the liberty of selecting and changing opinions, and whose habitual assent to the principles of religion had neither the firmness resulting from decisive arguments, nor the warmth of pious affection.* Such

* It will be obvious that I am describing the progress of one of the humbler order of aliens from all religion, and not that by which the great philosophic leaders have ascended the dreary eminence, where they look

a person had only, in the first place, to come into intimate acquaintance with a man, who had the art of alluding to a sacred subject in a manner which, without appearing like intentional contempt, divested it of its solemnity; and who had possessed himself of a few acute observations or plausible maxims, not explicitly

with so much complacency up to a vacant heaven, and down to the gulph of annihilation. *Their* progress undoubtedly is much more systematic and deliberate, and accompanied often by a laborious speculation, which, though in ever so perverted a train, the mind is easily persuaded to identify, because it *is* laborious, with the search after truth and the love of it. While however it is in a persevering train of thought, and not by the hasty movements of a more vulgar mind, that they pursue their deviation from some of the principles of religion into a final abandonment of it all, they probably are very greatly mistaken, if they assure themselves that the moral causes which contribute to guide and animate their progress are all of a sublime order; and if they could be fully revealed to their own view, they might perhaps be severely mortified to find what vulgar motives, while they were despising vulgar men, have ruled their intellectual career. Pride, which idolizes self, which revolts at every thing that comes in the form of *dictates*, and exults to find that there is a possibility of con-

hostile to revealed religion, but which, when opportunely brought into view in connexion with some points of it, tended to throw a slight degree of doubt on their truth and authority. Especially if either or both of these men had any decided moral tendencies and pursuits of a kind which christianity condemned, *the friend of intellectual and moral freedom* was assiduous to insinuate, that, according to the principles of reason and nature at least, it would be difficult to prove the wisdom or the necessity of some of those dictates of

troverting whether any dictates come from a greater than mortal source; repugnance both to the *laws* of a severe and sublime morality, and to the feeling of accountability to an intelligent all-powerful Authority that will not leave moral laws to be enforced solely by their own sanctions; contempt of inferior men; the attraction of a few brilliant examples; the fashion of a class; the ambition of shewing what ability can do, and what courage can dare—if such things as these, after all, have excited and directed the efforts of a philosophic spirit, the unbelieving philosopher must be content to acknowledge plenty of companions and rivals among little men, who are quite as capable of being actuated by these elevated principles as himself.

religion, which must however, he admitted, be revered because divine. Let the mind have once acquired a feeling as if the sacred system might in some points be invalidated, the involuntary inference would be rapidly extended to other parts, and to the whole. Nor was it long probably before this new instructor plainly avowed his own entire emancipation from a popular prejudice, to which he was kindly sorry to find a *sensible* young man still in captivity. But he had no doubt that the deductions of enlightened reason would successfully appeal to every liberal mind. And accordingly, after perhaps a few months of frequent intercourse, with the addition of two or three books, and the obvious aid of all the recollected vices of pretended christians and pretended christian churches, the whole venerable magnificence of Revelation was annihilated. Its illuminations respecting the Divinity, its miracles, its Messiah, its authority of moral legislation, its regions of

immortality and retribution, the sublime virtues and devotion of its prophets, apostles, and martyrs, together with the reasonings of so many accomplished advocates, and the credibility of history itself, were vanished all away; while the convert, exulting in his disenchantment, felt a strange pleasure to behold nothing but a dreary train of impostures and credulity stretching over those past ages which lately were gilded with so divine a vision, and the thickest Egyptian shades fallen on that total vast futurity which the spirit of inspiration had partially and very solemnly illuminated.

Nothing tempts the mind so powerfully on, as to have successfully begun to demolish what has been deemed to be most sacred. The soldiers of Cæsar probably had never felt themselves so brave, as after they had cut down the Massilian grove; nor the Philistines, as when the ark of the God of Israel was among their spoils: the mind is proud of its triumphs in propor-

tion to the reputed greatness of what it has overcome. And many examples would seem to indicate that the first proud triumphs over religious faith involve some fatality of advancing, however formidable the mass of arguments which may obstruct the progress, to further victories. But perhaps the intellectual difficulty of the progress might be less than a zealous believer would be apt to imagine. As the ideas which give the greatest distinctness to our conception of a Divine Being are imparted by revelation, and rest on its authority, the rejection of that revelation would in a great measure banish those ideas, and destroy that distinctness. We have but to advert to pure heathenism, to perceive what a faint conception of this Being could be formed by the strongest intellect in the absence of revelation; and after the *rejection* of it, the mind would naturally be carried very far back toward that darkness, so that some of the attributes of the Deity would immediately become, as they were with the heathens, sub-

jects of doubtful conjecture and hopeless speculation. But from this state of thought it is perhaps no vast transition to that, in which his being also shall begin to appear a subject of doubt; since the reality of a being is with difficulty apprehended, in proportion as its attributes are undefinable. And when the mind is brought into doubt, we know it easily advances to disbelief, if to the smallest plausibility of arguments be added any powerful moral cause for wishing such a conclusion. In the present case, there *might* be a very powerful cause, besides that pride of victory which I have just noticed. The progress in guilt which generally follows a rejection of revelation, makes it still more and more desirable that no object should remain to be feared. It was not strange therefore if this man read with avidity, or even strange if he read with something which his wishes completed into conviction, a few of the writers, who have attempted the last achievement of

presumptuous man. After inspecting these pages awhile, he raised his eyes, and the Great Spirit was gone. Mighty transformation of all things ! The luminaries of heaven no longer shone with his splendour ; the adorned earth no longer looked fair with his beauty ; the darkness of night had ceased to be rendered solemn by his majesty ; life and thought were not an effect of his all-pervading energy ; it was not his providence that supported an infinite charge of dependent beings ; his empire of justice no longer spread over the universe ; nor had even that universe sprung from his all-creating power. Yet when you saw the intellectual course brought to this signal conclusion, though aware of the force of each preceding and predisposing circumstance, you might nevertheless be somewhat struck with the suddenness of the final decision, and might be curious to know what kind of argument and eloquence could so quickly finish the work. You would examine those pages with the expectation probably of

something more powerful than subtlety attenuated into inanity, and, in that invisible and impalpable state, mistaken by the writer, and willingly admitted by the perverted reader, for profundity of reasoning; than attempts to destroy the certainty, or preclude the application, of some of those great familiar principles which must be taken as the basis of human reasoning, or it can have no basis; than suppositions which attribute the order of the universe to such causes as it would be felt ridiculous to pronounce adequate to produce the most trifling piece of mechanism; than mystical jargon which, under the name of *nature*, alternately exalts almost into the properties of a god, and reduces far below those of a man, some imaginary and undefinable agent or agency, which performs the most amazing works without power, and displays the most amazing wisdom without intelligence; than a zealous preference of that part of every great dilemma which merely confounds and sinks

E 3

These sentences are so long I lose the sense, Mr Foster.

the mind, to that which elevates while it overwhelms it; than a constant endeavour to degrade as far as possible every thing that is sublime in our speculations and feelings; or than monstrous parallels between religion and mythology. You would be still more unprepared to expect on so solemn a subject the occasional wit, or affectation of wit, which would seem rather prematurely expressive of exultation that the grand Foe is retiring.

A feeling of complete certainty would hardly be thus rapidly attained; but a slight degree of remaining doubt, and of consequent apprehension, would not prevent this disciple of darkness from accepting the invitation to pledge himself to the cause in some associated band, where profaneness and vice would consolidate impious opinions without the aid of augmented conviction, and where the fraternity, having been elated by the spirit of social daring to say, What is the Almighty that *we* should serve him? the individuals might

acquire each a firmer boldness to exclaim,
 Who is the Lord that *I* should obey his
 voice? Thus easy it is, my friend, for a
 man to meet that train of influences which
 may seduce him to live an infidel, though
 it may betray him to die a terrified be-
 liever; that train of which the infatuation,
 while it promises him the impunity of
 non-existence and degrades him to desire
 it, impels him to fill up the measure of his
 iniquity, till the divine wrath come upon
 him to the uttermost.

*Hypocritical
 nonsense*

LETTER III. VI

IN recounting so many influences that
 operate on man, it is grievous to observe
 that the incomparably noblest of all, reli-
 gion, is counteracted with a fatal success
 by a perpetual conspiracy of almost all the
 rest, aided by the intrinsic predisposition

of our nature, which yields itself with such consenting facility to every impression tending to estrange it still further from God.

It is a cause for wonder and sorrow, to see millions of rational creatures growing into their permanent habits, under the conforming efficacy of every thing which they ought to resist, and receiving no part of those habits from impressions of the Supreme Object. They are content that a narrow scene of a diminutive world, with its atoms and evils, should usurp and deprave and finish their education for immortality, while the Infinite Spirit is here, whose transforming companionship would exalt them into his sons, and, in defiance of a thousand malignant forces attempting to stamp on them an opposite image, lead them into eternity in his likeness. Oh why is it so possible that this greatest inhabitant of every place where men are living, should be the last whose society they seek, or of whose being con-

stantly near them they feel the importance? Why is it possible to be surrounded with the intelligent Reality which exists wherever we are, with attributes that are infinite, and not feel respecting all other things which may be attempting to press on our minds and affect their character, as if they retained with difficulty their shadows of existence, and were continually on the point of vanishing into nothing? Why is this stupendous Intelligence so retired and silent, while present, over all the scenes of the earth, and in all the paths and abodes of men? Why does he keep his glory invisible behind the shades and visions of the material world? Why does not this latent glory sometimes beam forth with such a manifestation as could never be forgotten, nor ever be remembered without an emotion of religious fear? And why, in contempt of all that he *has* displayed to excite either fear or love, is it still possible for a rational creature so to live, that it must finally come to an interview

with him in a character completed by the full assemblage of those acquisitions which have separately been disapproved by him through every stage of the accumulation? Why is it possible for feeble creatures to maintain their little dependent beings fortified and invincible in sin, amidst the presence of divine purity? Why does not the thought of such a Being strike through the mind with such intense antipathy to evil as to blast with death every active principle that is beginning to pervert it, and render gradual additions of depravity, growing into the solidity of habit, as impossible as for perishable materials to be raised into structures amidst the fires of the last day? How is it possible to forget the solicitude which should accompany the consciousness that such a Being is continually darting upon us the beams of observant thought, (if we may apply such a term to omniscience,) that we are exposed to the piercing inspection, compared to which the concentrated attention

of all the beings in the universe besides, would be but as the powerless gaze of an infant? 'Why is faith, that faculty of spiritual apprehension, so absent, or so incomparably more slow and reluctant to receive a just perception of the grandest of its objects, than the senses are adapted to receive the impressions of theirs? While there is a Spirit pervading the universe with an infinite energy of being, why have the few particles of dust which enclose *our* spirits the power to intercept all sensible communication with it, and to place them as in a vacuity where the sacred Essence had been precluded or extinguished? *why not?*

The reverential submission, with which you ought to contemplate the mystery of omnipotent benevolence forbearing to exert the agency which could assume an instantaneous ascendancy in every mind over the causes of depravation and ruin, will not avert your compassion from the unhappy persons who are practically

“without God in the world.” And if, by some vast enlargement of thought, you could comprehend the whole measure and depth of disaster contained in this exclusion, (an exclusion under which, to the view of a serious mind, the resources and magnificence of the creation would sink into a mass of dust and ashes, and all the causes of joy and hope into disgust and despair,) you would feel a distressing emotion at each recital of a life in which religion had no share; and you would be tempted to wish that some spirit from the other world, possessed of eloquence that might threaten to alarm the slumbers of the dead, would throw himself in the way of this one mortal, and this one more, to protest, in sentences of lightning and thunder, against the infatuation that can at once acknowledge there is a God, and be content to forego every connexion with him, but that of danger. You would wish they should rather be assailed by the “terror of the Lord,” than retain the satisfac-

tion of carelessness till the day of his mercy be past.

But you will not need such enlargement of comprehension, in order to compassionate the situation of persons who, with reason sound to think, and hearts not strangers to feeling, have advanced far into life, perhaps near to its close, without having felt the influence of religion. If there is such a Being as we mean by the term God, the ordinary intelligence of a serious mind will be quite enough to see that it must be a melancholy thing to pass through life, and quit it, just as if there were not. And sometimes it will appear as strange as it is melancholy; especially to a person who has been pious from his youth. He would be inclined to say, to a person who* has nearly finished an irreligious life, What would have been justly thought of you, if you could have been the greatest part of your time in the society of the wisest and best man on earth, (were it pos-

* what right would 'he' have to say anything to a person who had nearly finished his life? Vindictive or self righteous.

oh come
write, no need for modesty

sible to have ascertained that individual,) and have acquired no degree of conformity; much more, if you could all the while have acquired progressively the meanness, prejudices, follies, and vices, of the lowest society with which you might have been exposed at intervals to mingle? You might have been asked how *this* was possible. But then through what defect or infatuation of mind have you been able, during so many years spent in the presence of a GOD, to continue even to this hour as clear of all marks and traces of any divine influences having operated on you, as if the Deity were but a poetical fiction, or an idol in some temple of Asia? Obviously, as the immediate cause, through want of thought concerning him.

And why did you not think of him? Did a most solemn thought of him never *once* penetrate your soul, while admitting the proposition that there is such a Being? If it never did, what is reason, what is mind, what is man? If it did once, how could

its effects stop there? How could a deep thought, on so singular and momentous a subject, fail to impose on the mind a permanent necessity of frequently recalling it; as some awful or magnificent spectacle will haunt you with a long recurrence of its image, even if the spectacle itself were seen no more?

Why did you not think of him? How could you estimate so meanly your mind with all its capacities, as to feel no regret that an endless series of trifles should seize, and occupy as their right, all your thoughts, and deny them both the liberty and the ambition of going on to the greatest Object? How, while called to the contemplations which absorb the spirits of heaven, could you be so patient of the task of counting the flies of a summer's day?

Why did you not think of him? You knew yourself to be in the hands of some Being from whose power you could not be withdrawn; was it not an equal defect of

curiosity and prudence, to indulge a careless confidence that sought no acquaintance with his nature and his dispositions, nor ever anxiously inquired what conduct should be observed toward him, and what expectations might be entertained from him? You would have been alarmed to have felt yourself in the power of a mysterious stranger, of your own feeble species; but let the stranger be omnipotent, and you cared no more.

Why did you not think of him? One would deem that the thought of him must, to a serious mind, come second to almost every thought. The thought of virtue would suggest the thought of both a law-giver and a rewarder; the thought of crime, of an avenger; the thought of sorrow, of a consoler; the thought of an inscrutable mystery, of an intelligence that understands it; the thought of that ever-moving activity which prevails in the system of the universe, of a supreme agent; the thought of the human family, of a

of mother?

great father; the thought of all being, of a creator; the thought of life, of a preserver; and the thought of death, of a solemn and uncontrollable disposer. By what dexterity therefore of irreligious caution, did you avoid precisely every track where the idea of him would have met you, or elude that idea if it came? And what must sound reason pronounce of a mind which, in the train of millions of thoughts, has wandered to all things under the sun, to all the permanent objects or vanishing appearances in the creation, but never fixed its thought on the Supreme Reality; never approached, like Moses, “to see this great sight?”

If it were a thing which we might be allowed to imagine, that the Divine Being were to manifest himself in some striking manner to the senses, as by some resplendent appearance at the midnight hour, or by re-kindling on an elevated mountain the long-extinguished fires of Sinai, and uttering voices from those fires; would he not

compel from you an attention which you now refuse? Yes, you will say, he would then seize the mind with irresistible force, and religion would become its most absolute sentiment; but he only presents himself to faith. Well, and is it a worthy reason for disregarding him, that you *only believe* him to be present and infinitely glorious? Is it the office of faith to veil or annihilate its object? Cannot you reflect that the grandest representation of a spiritual and divine Being to the senses would bear not only no proportion to his glory but no relation to his nature, and could be adapted only to an inferior dispensation of religion, and to a people who, with the exception of a most extremely small number of men, had been totally untaught to carry their thoughts beyond the objects of sense? Are you not aware that such a representation would considerably tend to restrict you in your contemplation to a defined image, and therefore a most inadequate and subordi-

nate idea of the divine Being? While the idea admitted by faith, though less immediately striking, is capable of an illimitable expansion, by the addition of all that progressive thought can accumulate, under the continual certainty that all is still infinitely short of the reality.

On the whole, you would say, I regard *Th*
you as an object of great compassion; *is*
unless there can be no felicity in friendship *app*
with the Almighty, unless there be no glory in being assimilated to his excellence, unless there be no eternal rewards for his devoted servants, unless there be no danger in meeting him, at length, after a life estranged equally from his love and his fear. I deplore, at every period and crisis in the review of your life, that religion was not there. If religion had been there, your youthful animation would neither have been dissipated in the frivolity which, in the morning of the short day of life, fairly and formally sets aside all serious business for *that* day, nor would

have sprung forward into the emulation of vice, or the bravery of profaneness. If religion had been there, that one despicable companion, and that other malignant one, would not have seduced you into their society, or would not have retained you to participate their degradation. And if religion had accompanied the subsequent progress of your life, it would have elevated you to rank, at this hour, with those saints who will soon be added to "the spirits of the just." Instead of which, what are you now, and what are your expectations from that world, where piety alone can hope to find such a sequel of life, as will inspire exultation in the retrospect of this introductory period, in which the mind began to converse with the God of eternity?

On the other hand, it would be interesting to record, or to hear, the history of a character which has received its form, and reached its maturity, under the strongest operations of religion. We do

not know that there is a more beneficent or a more direct mode of the divine agency in any part of the creation than that which "apprehends" a man, as apostolic language expresses it, amidst the unthinking crowd, and leads him into serious reflection, into elevated devotion, into progressive virtue, and finally into a nobler life after death. When he has long been commanded by this influence, he will be happy to look back to its first operations, whether they were mingled in early life almost insensibly with his feelings, or came on him with mighty force at some particular time, and in connexion with some assignable and memorable circumstance, which was apparently the instrumental cause. He will trace all the progress of this his better life, with grateful acknowledgment to the sacred power which has advanced him to a decisiveness of religious habit that seems to stamp eternity on his character. In the great majority of things, habit is a greater

plague than ever afflicted Egypt ; in religious character, it is a grand felicity. The devout man exults in the indications of his being fixed and irretrievable. He feels this confirmed habit as the grasp of the hand of God, which will never let him go. From this advanced state he looks with firmness and joy on futurity, and says, I carry the eternal mark upon me that I belong to God ; I am free of the universe ; and I am ready to go to any world to which he shall please to transmit me, certain that every where, in height or depth, he will acknowledge me for ever.

LETTER VII.

THE preceding letters have attempted to exhibit only general views of the influences by which a reflective man may per-

ceive the moral condition of his mind to have been determined.

In descending into more particular illustrations, there would have been no end of enumerating the local circumstances, the relationships of life, the professions and employments, and the accidental events, which may have affected the character. A person who feels any interest in reviewing what has formed thus far his education for futurity, may carry his own examination into the most distinct particularity.—A few miscellaneous observations will conclude the essay.

You will have observed that I have said comparatively little of that which forms the exterior, and in general account, the main substance of the history of a man's life—the train of his fortunes and actions. If an adventurer or a soldier writes memoirs of himself for the information or amusement of the public, he may do well to keep his narrative alive by a constant crowded course of facts; for the greater

part of his readers will excuse him the trouble of investigating, and he might occasionally feel it a convenience to be excused from disclosing, if he had investigated, the history and merits of his internal principles. Nor can this ingenuousness be any part of his duty, any more than it is that of a fidler at a ball, so long as he tells all that probably he professes to tell, that is, where he has been, what he has witnessed, and what he has done. Let him go on with his lively anecdotes, or his legends of the marvellous, or his gazettes of marches, stratagems and skirmishes, and there is no obligation for him to turn either penitent or philosopher on our hands. But I am supposing a man to retrace himself through his past life, in order to acquire a complete knowledge of himself, and to record the investigation for his own instruction. Through such a retrospect, the exterior life will hold the second place in attention, as being the imperfect offspring of that in-

ternal state, which it is the primary and more difficult object to review. He will endeavour to trace himself outward, from his mind into his actions. No doubt indeed he will sometimes also trace himself inward, from his actions to his principles; and, in taking a comprehensive view of those actions, he will feel himself in possession of an important though defective explication of his interior character. Still it is that interior character, whether displayed in actions or not; which forms the leading object of inquiry. The chief circumstances of his practical life must however be mentioned, both because they are the indications of the state of his mind, and because they mark the points, and distinguish the stages of his progress.

Though in memoirs intended for publication, a large share of incident and action would generally be necessary, yet there are some men whose mental history alone might be very interesting to reflective readers; as for instance that of a

thinking man, remarkable for a number of complete changes of his speculative system. From observing the usual tenacity of views once deliberately adopted in mature life, we regard as a curious phenomenon, the man whose mind has been a kind of caravansera of opinions, entertained awhile, and then sent on pilgrimage; a man who has admired and dismissed systems with the same facility with which John Buncke found, adored, married, and interred his succession of wives, each one being, for the time, not only better than all that went before, but the best in the creation. You admire the versatile aptitude of a mind, sliding into successive forms of belief in this intellectual metempsychosis by which it animates so many new bodies of doctrines in their turn. And as none of those dying pangs which hurt you in a tale of India, attend the desertion of each of these speculative forms which the soul has awhile inhabited, you are extremely amused by the number

of transitions, and eagerly ask what is to be the next, for you never deem the present state of such a man's views to be for permanence, unless perhaps when he has terminated his course of believing every thing, in ultimately believing nothing. Even then, unless he is very old, or feels more pride in being a sceptic, the conqueror of all systems, than he ever felt in being the champion of one, even then, it is very possible he may spring up again, like a vapour of fire from a bog, and glimmer through new mazes, or retrace his course through half of those which he trod before. You will observe, that no respect attaches to this Proteus of opinion, after his changes have been multiplied; as no party expect him to remain with them, nor deem him much of an acquisition if he should. One, or perhaps two, considerable changes will be regarded as signs of a liberal inquirer, and therefore the party to which his first or his second intellectual conversion may assign him, will re-

ceive him gladly. But he will be deemed to have abdicated the dignity of reason, when it is found that he can adopt no principles but to betray them; and it will be perhaps justly suspected that there is something extremely infirm in the structure of that mind, whatever vigour may mark some of its operations, to which a series of very different, and sometimes contrasted theories, can appear in succession demonstratively true, and which imitates sincerely the perverseness which Petruchio only affected, declaring that which was yesterday, to a certainty, the sun, to be to-day, as certainly, the moon.

It would be curious to observe in a man who should make such an exhibition of the course of his mind, the sly deceit of self-love. While he despises the system which he has rejected, he does not deem it to imply so great a want of sense in *him* once to have embraced it, as in the rest, who were then or are now its disciples and advocates. No, in *him* it was no de-

bility of reason, it was at the utmost but a merge of it; and probably he is prepared to explain to you that such peculiar circumstances, as might warp even a very strong and liberal mind, attended his consideration of the subject, and misled him to admit the belief of what others prove themselves fools by believing.

Another thing apparent in a record of changed opinions would be, what I have noticed before, that there is scarcely any such thing in the world as simple conviction. It would be amusing to observe how reason had, in one instance, been over-ruled into acquiescence by the admiration of a celebrated name; or, in another, into opposition by the envy of it; how most opportunely reason discovered the truth just at the time that interest could be essentially served by avowing it; how easily the impartial examiner could be induced to adopt some part of another man's opinions, after that other had zealously approved some favourite, especially if un-

popular part of his, as the Pharisees almost became partial even to Christ, at the moment that he defended one of their doctrines against the Sadducees. It would be curious to see how a professed respect for a man's character and talents, and concern for his interests, might be changed, in consequence of some personal inattention experienced from him, into illiberal invective against him or his intellectual performances, and yet the railer, though actuated solely by petty revenge, account himself the model of equity and candour all the while. It might be seen how the patronage of power could elevate miserable prejudices into revered wisdom, while poor old Experience was mocked with thanks for her instruction; and how the vicinity or society of the rich, and, as they are termed, great, could perhaps melt a soul that seemed to be of the stern consistence of early Rome, into the gentlest wax on which Corruption could wish to imprint the venerable creed, "The right

divine of kings to govern wrong," with the pious inference that justice was outraged when virtuous Tarquin was expelled. I am supposing the *observer* to perceive all these accommodating dexterities of reason; for it were probably absurd to expect that any mind should itself be able, in its review, to detect all its own obliquities, after having been so long beguiled, like the mariners in a story which I remember to have read, who followed the direction of their compass, infallibly right as they thought, till they arrived at an enemy's port, where they were seized and doomed to slavery. It happened that the wicked captain, in order to betray the ship, had concealed a large loadstone at a little distance on one side of the needle.

On the notions and expectations of one stage of life, I suppose all reflecting men look back with a kind of contempt, though it may be often with the mingling wish that some of its enthusiasm of feeling could be recovered,—I mean the period

between proper childhood and maturity. They will allow that their reason was *then* feeble, and they are prompted to exclaim, What fools we have been—while they recollect how sincerely they entertained and advanced the most ridiculous speculations on the interests of life, and the questions of truth ; how regretfully astonished they were to find the mature sense of some of those around them so completely wrong ; yet in other instances what veneration they they felt for authorities for which they have since lost all their respect ; what a fantastic importance they attached to some most trivial things* ; what complaints against their fate were uttered on account of disappointments which they have since recollected with gaiety or self-congratulation ; what happiness of Elysium they expected from sources which would soon

* I recollect a youth of some acquirements, who earnestly wished the time might one day arrive, when his name should be adorned with the addition of D. D. which he deemed one of the sublimest of human distinctions.

have failed to impart even common satisfaction ; and how certain they were that the feelings and opinions then predominant would continue through life.

If a reflective aged man were to find at the bottom of an old chest, where it had lain forgotten fifty years, a record which he had written of himself when he was young, simply and vividly describing his whole heart and pursuits, and reciting verbatim many passages of the language which he sincerely uttered ; would he not read it with more wonder than almost every other writing could, at his age, inspire ? He would half lose the assurance of his identity, under the impression of this immense dissimilarity. It would seem as if it must be the tale of the juvenile days of some ancestor, with whom he had no connexion but that of name. He would feel the young man, thus introduced to him, separated by so wide a distance of character, as to render all congenial so-

ciality impossible. At every sentence he would be tempted to repeat, Foolish youth! I have no sympathy with your feelings, I can hold no converse with your understanding. Thus you see that in the course of a long life a man may be several moral persons, so various from one another, that if you could find a real individual that should nearly exemplify the character, in one of these stages, and another that should exemplify it, in the next, and so on to the last, and then bring these several persons together into one society, which would thus be a representation of the successive states of one man, they would feel themselves a most heterogenous party, would oppose and probably despise one another, and soon after separate, not caring if they were never to meet again. If the dissimilarity in mind were as great as in person, there would in both respects be a most striking contrast between the extremes at least, between the youth of seventeen and the sage of seventy. The

one of these contrasts an old man might contemplate, if he had a true portrait for which he sat in the bloom of his life, and should hold it beside a mirror in which he looks at his present countenance; and the other would be powerfully felt, if he had such a genuine and detailed memoir as I have supposed*. Might it not be worth while for a self-observant person in early life, to preserve, for the inspection of the old man if he should live so long, such a mental likeness of the young one? If it be not drawn near the time, it can never be drawn with sufficient accuracy.

If this sketch of life were not written till a very mature or an advanced period of it, a somewhat interesting point would be, to distinguish the periods during which the mind made its greatest progress in the

* Since a character, and a set of opinions, once formed, not unfrequently continue *substantially* through life, perhaps the moral and intellectual difference between the stages, is not quite as great as the physical. Some people have in fact but three or four stages in the whole of life.

How can this F 6
be quantified?

enlargement of its faculties, and the time when they appear to have reached and acknowledged their insuperable limits. And if there have been vernal seasons, if I may so express it, of goodness, periods separated off from the later course of life by some point of time, subsequent to which the christian virtues have had a less generous growth, this is a circumstance still more worthy to be strongly marked. No doubt it will be with a reluctant hand that he marks either of these circumstances; for a man could not reflect without regret that many children may have grown into maturity and great talent, and many unformed or defective characters into established excellence, since the period when he ceased to become abler or better. Pope, for instance, at the age of fifty, would have been incomparably more mortified than Dr. Johnson says his readers are, at the fact, if he had perceived it, that he could not then write better than he had written at the age of twenty.—And the

consciousness of having passed many years without any moral and religious progress, ought to be not merely the regret for an infelicity, but the remorse of guilt; since though natural causes must some where have circumscribed and fixed the extent of the intellectual power, an incessant advancement in the nobler distinctions has still continued to be possible, and will be possible, till the evening of rational life. The instruction resulting from a clear estimate of what has been effected or not in this capital concern, is the chief advantage to be derived from recording the stages of life, comparing one part with another, and bringing the whole into a comparison with the standard of perfection, and the illustrious human examples which have approached that standard the nearest. In forming this estimate, we shall keep in view the vast series of advantages and admonitions, which has run parallel to the train of years; and it will be inevitable to re-

collect, sometimes with mortification bordering on anguish, the sanguine calculations of improvement of the best kind, which at various periods the mind was delighted to make for other given future periods, should life be protracted till then, and promised itself most *certainly* to realize by the time of their arrival. Perhaps there might be even something more hopeful, at some past seasons, than these mere confident presumptions; there might be actual favourable omens, which raised and partly justified in ourselves and others, anticipations that have mournfully failed. My dear friend, it is very melancholy that **EVIL** must be so palpable, so hatefully conspicuous, to an enlightened conscience, in every retrospect of a human life.

If the supposed memoirs are to be carried forward as life advances, each period being recorded as soon as it has elapsed, they should not be composed by small daily or weekly accumulations, (though this practice may on another ground have


its value,) but at certain considerable intervals, as at the end of each year, or any other measure of time that is ample enough for some definable alteration to have taken place in the character or attainments.

It is needless to say that the *style* should be as simple as possible—unless indeed the writer accounts the *theme* worthy of being bedecked with brilliants and flowers. If he idolizes his own image so much as to think it deserves to be enshrined in a frame of gold, why, let him enshrine it.

Should it be asked what degree of explicitness ought to prevail through this review, in reference to those particulars on which conscience has fixed the deepest mark of condemnation. I answer, that if a man writes it exclusively for his own use, he ought to signify both the nature of the delinquency and the ~~measure~~ of it, so far at least as to secure to his mind a most defined recollection of the facts, and of the verdict pronounced by conscience

before its emotions were quelled by time. Such honest distinctness is necessary, because this will be the most useful part of his record for reflection to dwell upon—because this is the part which self-love is most willing to diminish and memory to dismiss—because he may be certain that mere general terms or allusions of censure will but little aid the cultivation of his humility—and because this license of saying so much about himself in the character of a biographer may become only a temptation to the indulgence of vanity, and a protection from the shame of it, unless he is made to feel that he is narrating at a severe confessional.

But perhaps he wishes to hold this record open to an intimate relative or friend; perhaps even thinks it might supply some interest and some lessons to his children. And ~~what~~ then? Why then it is perhaps too probable that though he could readily confess some of his faults, there may have been certain states of his mind, and cer-



tain circumstances in his conduct, which he cannot easily persuade himself to present to such inspection. Such a difficulty of being quite ingenuous is in every instance a cause for deep regret. Should not a man tremble to feel himself involved in a difficulty of confiding to an equal and a mortal, what has been all observed by the Supreme Witness and Judge? And the consideration of the large proportion of men constituting such instances, throws a melancholy hue over the general human character. It has several times in writing this essay occurred to me what strangers men may be to one another, whether as to the influences which have determined their characters, or as to the less obvious parts of their conduct. What strangers too we may be, with persons who have any power and caution of concealment, to the principles which are at this moment prevailing in the heart. Each mind has an interior apartment of its own, into which none but itself and the Divi-

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child.

nity can enter. In this retired place, the passions mingle and fluctuate in unknown agitations. Here all the fantastic and all the tragic shapes of imagination have a haunt where they can neither be invaded nor descried. Here the surrounding human beings, while quite unconscious of it, are made the subjects of deliberate thought, and many of the designs respecting them revolved in silence. Here projects, convictions, vows, are confusedly scattered, and the records of past life are laid. Here in solitary state sits Conscience, surrounded by her own thunders, which sometimes sleep, and sometimes roar, while the world does not know. The secrets of this apartment, could they have been fully brought forth, might have been fatal to that eulogy and splendour with which many a piece of biography has been exhibited by a partial and ignorant friend. If, in a man's own account of himself, written on the supposition of being seen by any other person, the substance of the

secrets of this apartment is brought forth, he throws open the last asylum of his character, where it is well if there be nothing found that will distress and irritate his most intimate friend, who may thus become the ally of his conscience to condemn, without the leniency which even conscience acquires from self-love. And if it is not brought forth, where is the integrity or value of the history; and what ingenuous man could bear to give a delusive assurance of his being, or having been, so much more worthy of applause or affection than conscience all the while pronounces? It is obvious then that a man whose sentiments and designs, or the undisclosed parts of whose conduct, have been stained with deep delinquency, must keep his record most sacred to himself, unless he feels such an unsupportable longing to relieve his heart by confiding its painful consciousness, that he can be content to hold the regard of his friend on the strength of his penitence and re-

covered virtue. As to the rest, whose memory of the past is sullied by shades if not by stains, they must either in the same manner retain this delineation for solitary use, or limit themselves, in writing it, to a deliberate and strong expression of the *measure* of conscious culpabilities, and their effect in the general character, with a certain reserve and indefiniteness of explanation that shall equally avoid particularity and mystery; or else, they must consent to meet their friends, who are likewise human and have had their errors, on terms of mutual ingenuous acknowledgment. In this confidential communication, each will learn to behold the other's deviations fully as much in that light in which they certainly are infelicities to be commiserated, as in that in which they are also faults or vices to be condemned; while both will earnestly endeavour to improve by their remembered improprieties. The apostle seems to encourage such a confidence, where he says,

“ Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another.”

But I shall find myself in danger of becoming ridiculous amidst these scruples about an entire ingenuousness to a confidential friend or two, while I glance into the literary world, and observe the number of historians of their own lives, who magnanimously throw the complete cargo, both of their vanities and their vices, before the whole public. Men who can gaily laugh at themselves for ever having even pretended to goodness ; men who can tell of having sought consolation for the sorrows of bereaved tenderness, in the recesses of debauchery ; men whose language betrays that they deem a spirited course of profligate adventures a much nobler thing than the stupidity of vulgar virtues, and who seem to claim the sentiments with which we regard an unfortunate hero, for the disasters into which these adventures led them ; venal partisans whose talents would hardly have been bought, if their venom had not made


up the deficiency ; profane travelling cock-combs ; players, and the makers of immoral plays—all these can narrate the course of a contaminated life with the most ingenuous effrontery. Even courtezans, grieved at the excess of modesty by which the age is afflicted, have endeavoured to diminish the evil, by presenting themselves before the public, in their narratives, in a manner very analogous to that in which the Lady Godiva is said to have consented, from a most generous inducement, to pass through the city of Coventry. They can gravely relate, perhaps with intermingled paragraphs and verses of plaintive sensibility, (a kind of weeds in which sentiment without principle apes and mocks mourning virtue,) the whole nauseous detail of their transitions from proprietor to proprietor. They can tell of the precautions for meeting some person of distinction, in a manner that should not subject him to the reputation of such a meeting ; the hour when they crossed the river in a boat ; the arrangements about

money; the kindness of the gentleman at one time, his contemptuous neglect at another; and every thing else that can turn the compassion with which we deplore their first misfortunes and errors, into detestation of the effrontery which cannot be content without proclaiming the commencement, sequel, and all, to the wide world.

With regard to all the classes of self-describers who thus think the publication of their vices necessary to crown their fame, one should wish there were some public mark and brand of emphatical reprobation, to reward this tribute to public morals. Men that court the pillory for the pleasure of it, ought to receive the honour of it too, in all those contumelious salutations which suit the merits of vice grown proud of its impudence. Those that "glory in their shame" should, like other distinguished personages, "pay a tax for being eminent." Yet I own the public itself is to be consulted in this case; for if the public welcomes such productions, it shews there are

readers who feel themselves a-kin to the writers, and it would be hard to deprive congenial souls of the luxury of their appropriate sympathies. If such is the taste, it proves that a considerable portion of the public deserves just that kind of respect for its virtue, which is very significantly implied in this confidence of its favour.

One is indignant at the cant pretence and title of Confessions, sometimes adopted by these narrators of their own disgrace, as if it were to be believed that penitence and humility would ever incite men to call thousands to witness an unnecessary disclosure of what oppresses them with grief and shame. If they would be severely mortified that only a few readers should think it worth their while to see them thus performing the work of self-degradation, like the fetid heroes of the Dunciad in a ditch, is it because they would gladly incur the contempt and disgust of multitudes in order to serve the cause of virtue? No, this title of Confessions is only a nominal defer-



ence to morality, necessary indeed to be paid, because mankind never forget to insist, that the *name* of virtue shall be devoutly respected, even while vice obtains from them that practical favour on which these writers place their reliance for toleration or applause. This slight homage being duly rendered, and occasionally repeated, they trust in the character of the community, that they shall not meet the kind of condemnation, and they have no desire for the kind of pity, which would strictly belong to criminals; nor is it any part of their penitence, to wish that society may become better by the odious repellency of their example. They are glad the age continues such, that even *they* may have claims to be praised; and honour of some kind, and from some quarter, is the object to which they aspire, and the consequence which they promise themselves. Let them once be convinced, that they make such exhibitions under the absolute condition of subjecting themselves

irredeemably to opprobrium, as in Miletus, the persons infected with a rage for destroying themselves, were by a solemn decree assured of being exposed, after the perpetration of the deed, in naked ignominy—and these literary suicides will be heard of no more.

Rousseau has given a memorable example of this voluntary humiliation, and has very honestly assigned the degree of contrition which accompanied the self-inflicted penance, in the declaration, that this document, with all its dishonours, shall be presented in his justification before the Eternal Judge. If we could, in any case, pardon the kind of ingenuousness which he has displayed, it would certainly be in the disclosure of a mind so amazingly singular as his *. We are willing to have such a being

* There is indeed one case in which this kind of honesty would be so signally useful to mankind, that it would deserve almost to be canonized into a virtue. If statesmen, including ministers, popular leaders, ambassadors, &c. would publish, before they go in the triumph of virtue to the "last audit," or leave to be

preserved, even to all the unsightly minutiae and anomalies of its form, to be placed, as an unique, in the moral museum of the world. *

Rousseau's impious reference to the Divine Judge, leads me to suggest, as I conclude, the consideration, that the history of each man's life, though it should not be written by himself or by any mortal hand, is thus far unerringly recorded, will one day be finished in truth, and one other day yet to come, will be brought to a final estimate. A mind accustomed to grave reflections is sometimes led involuntarily into a curiosity of awful conjecture, which

published after they are gone, each a frank exposition of motives, cabals, and manœuvres, it would give dignity to that blind adoration of power and rank in which mankind have always *superstitiously* lived, by supplying just reasons for that adoration. It would also give a new aspect to history; and perhaps might tend to a happy exorcism of that evil spirit which has never allowed nations to remain at peace.

* It is very needless to express the admiration, which it is impossible not to feel, of Rousseau's transcendent genius.

asks, What are those very words which I should read this night, if, as to Belshazzar, a hand of prophetic shade were sent to write before me the identical sentences in which that final estimate will be declared?—

ESSAY II.

On Decision of Character.

LETTER I.

My dear Friend,

WE have several times talked of this bold quality, and acknowledged its great importance. Without it, a human being, with powers at best but feeble, and surrounded by innumerable things tending to perplex, to divert, or to oppress, their operations, is indeed a pitiable atom, the sport of diverse and casual impulses. It is a poor and disgraceful thing, not to be able to reply, with some degree of certainty, to the simple questions, What will you be? What will you do?

A little acquaintance with mankind will supply numberless illustrations of the importance of this character. You will often see a person anxiously hesitating a long time between different, or opposite determinations, though impatient of the pain of such a state, and ashamed of its debility. A faint impulse of preference alternates toward the one, and toward the other; and the mind, while thus held in a trembling balance, is vexed that it cannot get some new thought, or feeling, or motive, that it has not more sense, more resolution, more of any thing that would save it from envying even the decisive instinct of brutes. It wishes that any circumstance might happen, or any person might appear, that could deliver it from the miserable suspense.

In many instances, when a determination is adopted, it is frustrated by this indecision. A man, for example, resolves to make a journey to-morrow, which he is not under an absolute necessity to make, but the in-

ducement appear, this evening, so strong, that he does not think it possible he can hesitate in the morning. In the morning however, these inducements have unaccountably lost much of their force. Like the sun that is rising at the same time, they appear dim through a mist; and the sky lowers, or he fancies that it lowers; the fatigue appears formidable; and he lingers, uncertain, till an advanced hour determine the question for him, by the certainty that it is now too late to go.

Perhaps a man has conclusive reasons for wishing to remove to another place of residence. But when he is going to take the first actual step towards executing his purpose, he is met by a new train of ideas, presenting the possible, and magnifying the unquestionable, disadvantages and uncertainties of a new situation; awakening the natural reluctance to quit a place to which habit has accommodated his feelings, and which has grown *warm* to him, if I may so express it, by his having been in it

so long ; giving new strength to his affection for the friends whom he must leave, and so detaining him still lingering, long after his serious judgment has dictated to him to begone.

A man may think of some desirable alteration in his plan of life ; perhaps in the arrangements of his family, or in the mode of his intercourse with society.—Would it be a good thing ? He thinks it would be a good thing. It certainly would be a very good thing. He wishes it were done. He will attempt it *almost* immediately. The following day, he doubts whether it would be quite prudent. Many things are to be considered. May there not be in the change some evil of which he is not aware ? Is this a proper time ? What will people say ?—And thus, though he does not formally renounce his purpose, he recedes from it, with a wish that he could be fully satisfied of the propriety of renouncing it. Perhaps he wishes that the thought had never occurred to him, since it has

diminished his self-complacency, without promoting his virtue. But the next day, his conviction of the wisdom and advantage of such a reform comes again with great force. Then, Is it so practicable as I was at first willing to imagine? Why not? Other men have done much greater things; a resolute mind is omnipotent; difficulty is a stimulus and a triumph to a strong spirit; "the joys of conquest are the joys of man." What need I care about people's opinion? It shall be done.—He makes the first attempt. But some unexpected obstacle presents itself; he feels the awkwardness of attempting an unaccustomed manner of acting; the questions or the ridicule of his friends disconcert him; his ardour abates and expires. He again begins to question, whether it be wise, whether it be necessary, whether it be possible; and at last, surrenders his purpose, to be perhaps resumed when the same feelings return, and to be in the same manner again relinquished.

While animated by some magnanimous sentiments which he has heard or read, or while musing on some great example, a man may conceive the design, and partly sketch the plan, of a generous enterprise; and his imagination revels in the felicity that would follow to others and to himself from its accomplishment. It is an essential part of the design that *he* shall accomplish it.

Yet a certain consciousness in his mind doubtfully asks, Is this any thing more than a dream; or am I really destined to achieve such an enterprise? Destined! and why are not this conviction of its excellence, this conscious duty of performing the noblest things that are possible, and this passionate ardour, enough to secure that I shall effect it?—He feels indignant at that failing part of his nature which puts him so far below his own conceptions, and below the examples which he is admiring; and this feeling assists him to resolve, that he will undertake this enterprise, that he certainly

will, though the Alps or the Ocean lie between him and the object. Again his ardour slackens ; distrustful of himself, he wishes to know how the design would appear to other minds ; and when he speaks of it to his associates, one of them wonders, another laughs, and another frowns. His pride attempts, while with them, a manful defence ; but his mind is gradually descending toward their level, he becomes ashamed to entertain a visionary project, which therefore, like a rejected friend, desists from intruding on him or following him, and he subsides, at last, into what he labours to believe a man too rational for the schemes of ill-calculating enthusiasm. It were strange if the effort to make out this favourable estimate of himself did not succeed, while it is so much more pleasant to attribute one's defect of enterprise to wisdom, which on maturer thought disapproves of it, than to imbecility, which shrinks from it.

A person of undecisive character won-

ders how all the embarrassments in the world happened to meet exactly in *his* way, to place him just in that one situation for which he is peculiarly unadapted, and in which he is also willing to think no other man could have acted with facility or confidence. Incapable of setting up a firm purpose on the basis of things as they are, he is often employed in vain speculations on some different supposable state of things, which would have saved him from all this perplexity and irresolution. He thinks what a determined course he could have pursued, *if* his talents, his health, his age, had been different; if he had been acquainted with some one person sooner; if his friends were, in this or the other point, different from what they are; or if fortune had showered her favours on him. And he gives himself as much license to complain, as if a right to all these advantages had been conferred on him at his nativity, but refused, by a malignant or capricious fate, to his life. Thus he is occupied—instead

of catching with a vigilant eye, and seizing with a strong hand, all the possibilities of his actual situation.

A man without decision can never be said to belong to himself; since, if he dared to assert that he did, the puny force of some cause, about as powerful, you would have supposed, as a spider, may capture the hapless boaster the very next moment, and triumphantly shew the futility of the determinations by which he was to have proved the independence of his understanding and his will. He belongs to whatever can seize him; and innumerable things do actually verify their claim on him, and arrest him as he tries to go along; as twigs and chips, floating near the edge of a river, are intercepted by every weed, and whirled in every little eddy. Having concluded on a design, he may pledge himself to accomplish it, *if* the five hundred diversities of feeling which may come within the week, will let him. As his character precludes all foresight of his conduct, he may sit and

wonder what form and direction his views and actions are destined to take to-morrow; as a farmer waits the uncertain changes of the clouds to decide what he shall do.

This man's opinions and determinations always depend very much on other human beings; and what chance for consistency and stability, while the persons with whom he may converse, or transact, are so various? This very evening, he may talk with a man whose sentiments will melt away the present form and outline of his purposes; however firm and defined he may have fancied them to be. A succession of persons whose faculties were stronger than his own, might, in spite of his irresolute re-action, take him and dispose of him as they pleased. An infirm character practically confesses itself made for subjection, and passes, like a slave, from owner to owner. Sometimes indeed it happens, that a man of this sort falls into the train, and under the permanent ascendancy, of some one stronger character, which thus becomes through life the ora-

cle and guide, and gives the inferior a steady will and plan. This, when the leading character is virtuous, is a fortunate relief to the feeling, and an advantageous point gained to the utility, of the subordinate appended mind.

It is inevitable that the regulation of every man's plan must greatly depend on the course of events, which come in an order not to be foreseen or prevented. But even in accommodating the plans of conduct to the train of events, the difference between two men may be no less than that in the one instance the man is subservient to the events, and in the other the events are made subservient to the man. Some men seem to have been taken along by a succession of events, and, as it were, handed forward in quiet passiveness from one to another, without any determined principle in their own characters, by which they could constrain those events to serve a design formed antecedently to them, or apparently in defiance of them. The events

seized them as a neutral material, not they the events. Others, advancing through life with an internal invincible determination of mind, have seemed to make the train of circumstances, whatever they were, conduce as much to their chief design as if they had taken place on purpose. It is wonderful, how even the apparent casualties of life seem to bow to a spirit that will not bow to them, and yield to assist a design, after having in vain attempted to frustrate it.

You may have seen such examples, though they are comparatively not numerous. You may have seen a man of this strong character in a state of indecision concerning some affair in which it was requisite for him to determine, because it was requisite for him to act. But, in this case, his manner would assure you that he would not remain long undecided; you would wonder if you found him still at a loss the next day. If he explained his thoughts, you would perceive that their clear process,

evidently at each effort, approaching nearer to the result, must certainly reach it ere long. The deliberation of such a mind is a very different thing from the fluctuation of the other. To *know how* to obtain a determination, is one of the first symptoms of a rationally decisive character.

When the decision was formed, and the purpose fixed, you would feel an entire assurance that something would absolutely be done. It is characteristic of such a mind, to think for effect; and the pleasure of escaping from temporary doubt gives an additional impulse to the force with which it is carried into action. Such a man will not re-examine his conclusions with endless repetition, and he will not be delayed long by consulting other persons, after he has ceased to consult himself. He cannot bear to sit still among unexecuted decisions and unattempted projects. We wait to hear of his achievements, and are confident we shall not wait long. The possibility, or the means, may not be obvious to us, but we know

that every thing will be attempted, and that such a mind is like a river, which, in whatever manner it is obstructed, will make its way somewhere. It must have cost Cæsar many anxious hours of deliberation, before he decided to pass the Rubicon; but it is probable he suffered but few to elapse after his decision, before he did pass it. And any one of his friends, who should have been apprized of this determination, and understood his character, would have smiled contemptuously to hear it insinuated that though Cæsar had resolved, Cæsar would not dare; or that though he might cross the Rubicon whose opposite bank presented to him no hostile legions, he might come to other rivers which he would not cross; or that either rivers, or any other obstacle, would deter him from prosecuting the determination from this ominous commencement to its very last consequence.

One signal advantage possessed by a mind of this character, is, that its passions

are not wasted. The whole measure of passion of which any mind with important transactions before it, is capable, is not more than enough to supply interest and energy to its practical exertions; and therefore as little as possible of this sacred fire should be expended in a way that does not augment the force of action. But nothing less tends to vigour of action, than protracted anxious fluctuation, intermixed with resolutions decided and revoked, while yet nothing causes a greater expence of feeling. The heart is fretted and exhausted by being subjected to an alternation of contrary excitements, with the ultimate mortifying consciousness of their contributing to no end. The long-wavering deliberation, whether to perform some bold action of difficult virtue, has often cost more to feeling than the action itself, or a series of such actions, would have cost; with the great disadvantage too of being relieved by none of that invigoration, which, to the man in action,

would have sprung from the spirit of the action itself, and have renovated the ardour which it was expending. A person of decisive character, by consuming as little passion as possible in dubious musings and abortive resolutions, can secure its utmost value and use, by throwing it all into effectual operation.

Another advantage of this character, is, that it exempts from a great deal of interference and persecution, to which an irresolute man is subjected. Weakness, in every form, tempts arrogance; and a man may be allowed to wish for a kind of character with which stupidity and impertinence may not make so free. When a firm decisive spirit is recognised, it is curious to see how the space clears around a man, and leaves him room and freedom. The disposition to interrogate, dictate, or banter, preserves a respectful and politic distance, judging it not unwise to keep the peace with a person of so much energy. A conviction that he understands, and that

he wills with extraordinary force, silences the conceit that intended to perplex or instruct him, and intimidates the malice that was disposed to attack him. There is a feeling, as in respect of Fate, that the decrees of so inflexible a spirit *must* be right, or that, at least, they *will* be accomplished.

But not only will he secure the freedom of acting for himself, he will obtain also by degrees the coincidence of those in whose company he is to transact the business of life. If the manners of such a man are free from arrogance, and he can clothe his firmness in a moderate degree of insinuation; and if his measures have partly lost the appearance of being the dictates of his will, under the wider and softer sanction of some experience that they are reasonable; both competition and fear will be laid to sleep, and his will may acquire an unresisted ascendancy over many, who will be pleased to fall into the mechanism of a system, which

they find makes them more successful and happy than they could have been amidst the anxiety of adjusting plans and expedients of their own, and the consequences of often adjusting them ill. I have known several parents, both fathers and mothers, whose management of their families has answered this description, and has displayed a striking example of the facile complacency with which a number of persons, of different ages and dispositions, will yield to the decisions of a firm mind, acting on an equitable and enlightened system.

The last resource of this character, is, hard inflexible pertinacity, on which it may be allowed to rest its strength, after finding it can be effectual in none of its milder forms. I remember admiring an instance of this kind, in a firm sagacious and very estimable old man, whom I well knew, and who is now dead. Being on a jury, in a trial of life and death, he was completely satisfied of the innocence of

the prisoner; all the other eleven were of the opposite opinion: but he was resolved that a verdict of guilty should not be brought in. In the first place, he spent several hours in trying to convince them; but found that he made no impression, and that he was fast exhausting the strength which was to be reserved for another mode of operation. He therefore calmly told them, it should now be a trial who could endure confinement and famine the longest; and that they might be quite assured he would sooner die, than release them at the expence of the prisoner's life. In this situation they spent about twenty-four hours; when at length they all acceded to his verdict of acquittal.

It is not necessary to amplify on the indispensable importance of this quality, in order to the accomplishment of any thing eminently good. We instantly see, that every path to signal excellence is so obstructed and beset, that none but a spirit so qualified can pass.—But it is time to

examine what are the elements which compose the character.



LETTER II.

PERHAPS the best mode would be, to bring into our thoughts, in succession, the most remarkable examples of this character that we have known in real life, or that we have read of in history or even in fiction, and attentively to observe, in their conversations, manners, and actions, what principles appear to produce, or to constitute, this commanding distinction. You will easily pursue this investigation yourself. I lately made a partial attempt, and shall offer you a number of suggestions.

As a previous observation, it is beyond all doubt that very much depends on the constitution of the body. It is for physiologists to explain the *manner* in which

corporeal organization affects the mind; I only assert the fact, that there is in the material construction of some persons, much more than of others, some quality which augments, if it does not create, both the stability of their resolution, and the energy of their active tendencies. There is something that, like the ligatures which one class of the Olympic combatants bound on their hands and wrists, braces round, if I may so describe it, and compresses, the powers of the mind, giving them a steady forcible spring and reaction, which they would presently lose, if they could be transferred into a constitution of soft, yielding, treacherous debility. The action of strong character seems to demand something firm in its corporeal basis, as massive engines require, for their weight and for their working, to be fixed on a solid foundation. Accordingly I believe it would be found, that a majority of the persons most remarkable for decisive character, have possessed great con-

stitutional firmness. I do not mean an exemption from disease and pain, nor any certain measure of mechanical strength, but a tone of vigour, the opposite to lassitude, and adapted to great exertion and endurance. This is clearly evinced in respect to many of them, by the prodigious labours and deprivations which they have borne in prosecuting their designs, The physical nature has seemed a proud ally of the moral one, and with a hardness that would never shrink, has sustained the energy that could never remit.

A view of the disparities between the different races of animals inferior to man, will shew the effect of organization on disposition. Compare, for instance, a lion with the common beasts of our fields, many of them composed of a larger bulk of animated substance. What a vast superiority of courage, impetuous movement, and determined action ; and we attribute this difference to some great dissimilarity of modification in the composi-

tion of the animated material. Now it is probable that some difference partly analogous subsists between human bodies, and that this is no small part of the cause of the striking inequalities in respect of decisive character. A very decisive man has probably more of the physical quality of a *lion* in his composition than other men.

It is observable that women in general have less inflexibility of character than men; and though many moral influences contribute to this difference, the principal cause is, probably, something less firm in the corporeal texture. Now one man may have in his constitution a firmness of texture, exceeding that of other men in a much greater degree than that by which men in general exceed women.

If there have been found some resolute spirits powerfully asserting themselves in feeble vehicles, it is so much the better; since this would authorize a hope, that if all the other grand requisites can be com-

bined, they may form a strong character, in spite of the counteraction of an unadapted constitution. And on the other hand, no constitutional hardness will form the true character, without those grand principles; though it may produce that false and contemptible kind of decision which we term *obstinacy*; a mere stubbornness of temper, which can assign no reasons but its will, for a constancy which acts in the nature of dead weight rather than of strength; resembling less the reaction of a powerful spring than the gravitation of a big stone.

The first prominent mental characteristic of the person whom I describe, is, a complete confidence in his own judgment. It will perhaps be said, that this is not so uncommon a qualification. I however think it is uncommon. It is indeed obvious enough, that almost all men have a flattering estimate of their own understanding, and that so long as this understanding has no harder task than to form opinions which

are not to be tried in action, they have a most self-complacent assurance of being right. This assurance extends to the judgments which they pass on the proceedings of others. But let them be brought into the necessity of adopting actual measures in an untried proceeding, where, unassisted by any previous example or practice, they are reduced to depend on the resources of pure judgment alone, and you will see, in many cases, this confidence of opinion vanish away. The mind seems all at once placed in a misty vacuity, where it reaches round on all sides, but can find nothing to take hold of. Or if not lost in vacuity, it is overwhelmed by confusion, and feels as if its faculties were annihilated as soon as it begins to think of schemes and calculations among the possibilities, chances, and hazards, which overspread a wide untrodden field; and this conscious imbecility becomes severe distress, when it is believed that consequences of serious or unknown good or evil are depending on the deci-

sions which are to be formed amidst so much uncertainty. The thought painfully recurs at each step and turn, I may be right, but it is more probable I am wrong. It is like the case of a rustic walking in London, who, having no certain direction through the vast confusion of streets to the place where he wishes to be, advances, and hesitates, and turns, and inquires, and becomes, at each corner, still more inextricably perplexed*. A man in this situation feels he shall be very unfortunate if he cannot accomplish more than he can understand.—Is not this frequently, when brought to the practical test, the state of a mind not much disposed, in general, to undervalue its own sense?

In cases where judgment is not so completely bewildered, you will yet perceive

* “Why does not the man call a hackney-coach?” a gay reader, I am aware, will say of the person so bewildered in the great town. So he might, certainly; and the gay reader and I have only to deplore that there is no parallel convenience for the assistance of perplexed understandings.

a great practical distrust of it. A man has perhaps advanced a considerable way towards a decision, but then lingers at a small distance from it, till necessity, with a stronger hand than conviction, impels him upon it. He cannot see the whole length of the question, and suspects the part beyond his sight to be the most important, because it *is* beyond. He fears that certain possible consequences, if they should follow, would cause him to reproach himself for his present determination. He wonders how this or the other person would have acted in the same circumstances, eagerly catches at any thing like a respectable precedent, and looks anxiously round to know what each person thinks on the subject; while the various and opposite opinions to which he listens, perhaps only serve to confound his perception of the track of thought by which he had hoped to reach his conclusion. Even when that conclusion is obtained, there are not many minds that

might not be brought a few degrees back into dubious hesitation, by a man of respected understanding saying, in a confident tone, Your plan is injudicious; your selection is unfortunate; the event will disappoint you.

It cannot be supposed that I am maintaining such an absurdity as that a man's complete reliance on his own judgment is necessarily a proof of that judgment being correct and strong. Intense stupidity may be in this point the rival of clear-sighted wisdom. I had once a slight knowledge of a person, whom no mortal, not even Cromwell, could have excelled in the article of confidence in his judgment, and consequent inflexibility of conduct; while at the same time his successive schemes were ill-judged to a degree that made his disappointments ridiculous rather than pitiable. He was not an example of that simple obstinacy which I have mentioned before; for he considered his measures, and did not want for reasons which satis-

fixed himself beyond a doubt of their being most judicious. This confidence of opinion may be possessed by a person in whom it will be contemptible or mischievous ; but its proper place is in a very different character, and without it there can be no dignified actors in human affairs.

If, after observing how foolish this confidence appears as a feature in a weak character, it be inquired what it is in a justly decisive person's manner of thinking, which authorizes him in this firm assurance that his view of the concerns before him is comprehensive and accurate ; I answer, that he is justified in this persuasion, because he is conscious that objects are presented to his mind with an exceedingly distinct and perspicuous aspect, not like the shapes of moon-light, or like Ossian's ghosts, dim forms of uncircumscribed shade ; because he sees the different points of the subject in an arranged order, not in dispersed fragments ; because in each deliberation the main object keeps its clear pre-emi-

nence, and he perceives the bearings which the subordinate and conducive ones have on it; because perhaps several dissimilar trains of thought lead him to the same conclusion; and because he finds that his judgment does not vary according to the moods of his feelings.

It may be presumed that a high degree of this character is not attained without a considerable measure of experience and observation, though possibly they have been supplied in a comparatively short space of time. These have taught the man by what rule to anticipate the consequences to follow from certain actions in certain situations of affairs, as rationally as what fruit to expect from a certain kind of tree. To some extent therefore he is instructed both how to proceed and what to expect; and as to those new combinations of circumstances which no calculation can foresee, and to which no experience or previous observation will apply, he can trust to the resources which he is persuaded

his intellect will open to him, or is humbly confident, if he is a devout man, that the Supreme Intelligence will not suffer to be wanting to him, when the occasion arrives. In proportion as his views include, at all events, more certainties than those of other men, he is less fearful, and has less reason to be fearful, of contingencies. And if in the course of executing his design, unexpected disastrous events should befall, but which are not owing to any thing wrong in the plan and principles of that design, but to foreign causes; it will be characteristic of a strong mind to attribute these events discriminatively to their own causes, and not to the *plan*, which therefore, instead of being disliked and relinquished, will be still as much approved as before, and the man will proceed calmly to the sequel of it without any change of arrangement; unless indeed these sinister events should be such as to alter the whole state of things to which the plan was correctly adapted, and so to create a neces-

sity on this account for an entirely new one to be formed.

Without absolutely despising the understandings of other men, he will perceive their dimensions compared with his own, which will preserve its independence through every communication and every encounter. It is however a part of this very independence, that he will hold himself at liberty to alter his opinion, if the information which may be communicated to him, shall give sufficient reason. And as no one is so sensible of the importance of a complete acquaintance with a subject as the man who is always endeavouring to think conclusively, he will listen with the utmost attention to the *information*, which may be received sometimes from persons for whose *understanding* he has no great respect. Counsel will in general have only so much weight with him as it supplies knowledge which may assist his judgment; he will yield nothing to it as authority; but he may hear it with more candour and

good temper, from being conscious of this independence of his judgment, than the man who is afraid lest the first person that begins to persuade him, should confound his determination. He feels it entirely a work of his own to deliberate and to resolve, amidst all the advice which may be attempting to control him. If, with an assurance of his intellect being of the highest order, he also holds a commanding station, he will feel it gratuitous to consult with any one, excepting merely to receive statements of facts. This appears to be exemplified in the man, who has lately shewn the nations of Europe how large a portion of the world may, through the divine permission, be at the mercy of the solitary workings of an individual mind.

The strongest trial of this determined style of judgment is in those cases of urgency, where something must immediately be done, and where the consequences of deciding right or wrong are of great importance; as in the office of a medical man

in treating a patient whose situation, while it renders some strong means indispensable, renders it extremely doubtful which ought to be selected. A still stronger illustration is the case of a general, who is compelled, in the very instant, to make dispositions on which the event of a battle, the lives of ten thousand of his men, or perhaps almost the fate of a nation, may depend. He may even be reduced to choose between two dreadful expedients. Such a dilemma is described in Denon's account of one of the sanguinary conflicts between the French and Mamelukes, as having for a while held Desaix, though a very decisive commander, in a state of anguish.

LETTER III.

THIS indispensable basis, confidence of opinion, is however not enough to constitute the character in question. For

many persons, who have been conscious and proud of a much stronger grasp of thought than ordinary men, and have held the most decided opinions on important things to be done, have yet exhibited, in the listlessness or inconstancy of their actions, a contrast and a disgrace to the operations of their understandings. For want of some cogent feeling impelling them to carry every internal decision into action, they have been still left where they were; and a dignified judgment has been seen in the hapless plight of having no effective forces to execute its decrees.

It is evident then, and I perceive I have partly anticipated this article in the first letter, that another essential principle of the character, is, a total incapability of surrendering to indifference or delay the serious determinations of the mind. A strenuous *will* must accompany the conclusions of thought, and constantly urge the utmost efforts for their practical accomplishment. The intellect must be invested,

if I may so describe it, with a glowing atmosphere of passion, under the influence of which, the cold dictates of reason take fire, and spring into active powers.

Revert once more in your thoughts to the persons most remarkably distinguished by this decision. You will perceive, that instead of allowing themselves to sit down delighted after the labour of successful thinking, as if they had performed some great thing, they regard this labour but as a circumstance of preparation, and the conclusions resulting from it as of no more value, till applied to the greater labour which is to follow, than the entombed lamps of the Rosicrucians. They are not disposed to be content in a region of mere ideas, while they ought to be advancing into the scene of realities; they retire to that region sometimes, as ambitious adventurers anciently went to Delphi, to consult, but not to reside. You will therefore find them almost uniformly in determined pursuit of some object, on

which they fix a keen and steady look, and which they never lose sight of, while they follow it through the confused multitude of other things.

The manner of a person actuated by such a spirit, seems to say, Do you think that I would not disdain to adopt a purpose which I would not devote my utmost force to effect; or that having thus devoted my exertions, I will intermit or withdraw them, through indolence, debility, or caprice; or that I will surrender my object to any interference except the uncontrollable dispensations of Providence? No, I am linked to my determination with iron bands; my purpose is become my fate, and I must accomplish it, unless arrested by calamity or death.

This display of systematic energy seems to indicate a constitution of mind in which the passions are exactly commensurate with the intellectual part, and at the same time hold an inseparable correspondence with it, like the faithful sympathy of the

tides with the phases of the moon. There is such an equality and connexion, that subjects of the decisions of judgment become proportionally and of course the objects of passion. When the judgment decides with a very strong preference, that same strength of preference, actuating also the passions, devotes them with energy to the object, so long as it is thus approved. If therefore this strong preference of the judgment continues, the passions will be fixed in a state of habitual energy, and this will produce such a conduct as I have described. When therefore a firm self-confiding judgment fails to make a decisive character, it is evident that either there is in that mind a deficient measure of passion, which makes an indolent or irresolute man; or that the passions perversely sometimes coincide with judgment and sometimes desert it, which makes an inconsistent or versatile man.

There is no man so irresolute as not to act with determination in many single

cases, where the motive is powerful and simple, and where there is no need of plan and perseverance; but this gives no claim to the term *character*, which expresses the habitual tenour of a man's active being. The character may be displayed in the successive unconnected undertakings, which are each of limited extent, and end with the attainment of their objects. But it is seen to the greatest advantage in those grand schemes of action, which have no necessary point of conclusion, which continue on through successive years, and extend even to that dark period when the agent himself is withdrawn from human sight.

I have repeatedly remarked to you, in conversation, the effect of what has been called a Ruling Passion. When its object is noble, and an enlightened understanding directs its movements, it appears to me a great felicity; but whether its object be noble or not, it infallibly creates, where it exists in great force, that active ardent

constancy, which I describe as a capital feature of the decisive character. The Subject of such a commanding passion wonders, if indeed he were at leisure to wonder, at the persons who pretend to attach importance to an object which they make none but the most languid efforts to secure. The utmost powers of the man are constrained into the service of the favourite Cause by this passion, which sweeps away, as it advances, all the trivial objections and little opposing motives, and seems almost to open a way through impossibilities. This spirit comes on him in the morning as soon as he recovers his consciousness, and commands and impels him through the day with a power from which he could not emancipate himself if he would. When the force of habit is added, the determination becomes invincible, and seems to assume rank with the great laws of nature, making it nearly as certain that such a man will persist in his course as that in the morning the sun will rise.

A persisting untameable efficacy of soul gives a seductive and pernicious dignity even to a character and a course which every moral principle forbids us to approve. Often in the narrations of history and fiction, an agent of the most dreadful designs compels a sentiment of deep respect for the unconquerable mind displayed in their execution. While we shudder at his activity, we say with regret, mingled with an admiration which borders on partiality, What a noble being this would have been, if goodness had been his destiny ! The partiality is evinced in the very selection of terms, by which we shew that we are tempted to refer his atrocity rather to his destiny than to his choice. I wonder whether an emotion like this, has not been experienced by each reader of *Paradise Lost*, relative to the Leader of the infernal spirits ; a proof, if such were the fact, that a very serious error has been committed by the greatest poet. In some of the high examples of ambition, we

almost reverse the force of mind which impelled them forward through the longest series of action, superior to doubt and fluctuation, and disdainful of ease, of pleasures, of opposition, and of hazard. We bow to the ambitious spirit which reached the true sublime, in the reply of Pompey to his friends who dissuaded him from venturing on a tempestuous sea, in order to be at Rome on an important occasion : " It is necessary for me to go, it is not necessary for me to live."

Revenge has produced wonderful examples of this unremitting constancy to a purpose. Zanga is a well-supported illustration. And you may have read a real instance of, I think, a Spaniard, who, being injured by another inhabitant of the same town, resolved to destroy him : the other was apprized of this, and removed with the utmost secrecy, as he thought, to another town at a considerable distance, where however he had not been more than a day or two, before he found that his

enemy was arrived there. He removed in the same manner to several parts of the kingdom remote from each other; but in every place quickly perceived that his deadly pursuer was near him. At last, he went to South America, where he had enjoyed his security but a very short time, before his unrelenting enemy came up with him, and effected his purpose.

You may recollect the mention, in one of our conversations, of a young man, who wasted in two or three years a large patrimony in profligate revels with a number of worthless associates, who called themselves his friends, and who, when his last means were exhausted, treated him of course with neglect, or contempt. Reduced to absolute want, he one day went out of the house with an intention to put an end to his life; but wandering awhile almost unconsciously, he came to the brow of an eminence which overlooked what were lately his estates. Here he sat down, and remained fixed in thought a number of

hours, at the end of which he sprang from the ground with a vehement exulting emotion. He had formed his resolution, which was, that all these estates should be his again; he had formed his plan too, which he instantly began to execute. He walked hastily forward, determined to seize the very first opportunity, of however humble a kind, to gain any money, though it were ever so despicable a trifle, and resolved absolutely not to spend, if he could help it, a farthing of whatever he might obtain. The first thing that drew his attention, was, a heap of coals shot out of carts on the pavement before a house. He offered himself to shovel or wheel them into the place where they were to be laid, and was employed. He received a few pence for the labour; and then, in pursuance of the saving part of his plan, requested some small gratuity of meat and drink, which was given him. He then looked out for the next thing that might chance to offer, and went, with indefati-

gible industry, through a succession of servile employments, in different places, of longer and shorter duration, still scrupulously avoiding, as far as possible, the expense of a penny. He promptly seized *every* opportunity which could advance his design, without regarding the meanness of occupation or appearance. By this method he had gained, after a considerable time, money enough to purchase, in order to sell again, a few cattle, of which he had taken pains to understand the value. He speedily but cautiously turned his first gains into second advantages; retained without a single deviation his extreme parsimony; and thus advanced by degrees into larger transactions and incipient wealth. I did not hear, or have forgotten, the continued course of his life; but the final result was, that he more than recovered his lost possessions, and died an inveterate miser, worth 60,000*l*. I have always recollected this as a signal instance, though in an unfortunate and ignoble direction,

of decisive character, and of the extraordinary *effect*, which according to general laws, belongs to the strongest form of such a character.

But not less decision has been displayed by men of virtue. In this distinction no man ever exceeded, for instance, or ever will exceed, the late illustrious Howard.

The energy of his determination was so great, that if instead of being habitual, it had been shewn only for a short time on particular occasions, it would have appeared a vehement impetuosity; but by being unintermitted, it had an equability of manner which scarcely appeared to exceed the tone of a calm constancy, it was so totally the reverse of any thing like turbulence or agitation. It was the calmness of an intensity kept uniform by the nature of the human mind forbidding it to be more, and by the character of the individual forbidding it to be less. The habitual passion of his mind was a measure of feeling almost equal to the temporary extremes and pa-

roxysms of common minds: as a great river, in its customary state, is equal to a small or moderate one when swollen to a torrent.

The moment of finishing his plans in deliberation, and commencing them in action, was the same. I wonder what must have been the amount of that bribe in emolument or pleasure, that would have detained him a week inactive after their final adjustment. The law which carries water down a declivity, was not more unconquerable and invariable than the determination of his feelings toward the main object. The importance of this object held his faculties in a state of excitement which was too rigid to be affected by lighter interests, and on which therefore the beauties of nature and of art had no power. He had no leisure feeling which he could spare to be diverted among the innumerable varieties of the extensive scene which he traversed; all his subordinate feelings lost their separate existence and operation, by falling into the grand one. There have

not been wanting trivial minds, to mark this as a fault in his character. But the mere men of taste ought to be silent respecting such a man as Howard; he is above their sphere of judgment. The invisible spirits, who fulfil their commission of philanthropy among mortals, do not care about pictures, statues, and sumptuous buildings; and no more did he, when the time in which he must have inspected and admired them, would have been taken from the work to which he had consecrated his life. The curiosity which he might feel, was reduced to wait till the hour should arrive, when its gratification should be presented by conscience, which kept a scrupulous charge of all his time, as the most sacred duty of that hour. If he was still at every hour, when it came, fated to feel the attractions of the fine arts but the second claim, they might be sure of their revenge; for no other man will ever visit Rome under such a despotic consciousness of duty as to refuse himself time for sur-

veying the magnificence of its ruins. Such a sin against taste is very far beyond the reach of common saintship to commit. It implied an inconceivable severity of conviction, that he had *one thing to do*, and that he who would do some great thing in this short life, must apply himself to the work with such a concentration of his forces, as, to idle spectators who live only to amuse themselves, looks like insanity.

His attention was so strongly and tenaciously fixed on his object, that even at the greatest distance, like the Egyptian pyramids to travellers, it appeared to him with a luminous distinctness as if it had been nigh, and beguiled the toilsome length of labour and enterprise by which he was to reach it. It was so conspicuous before him, that not a step deviated from the direction, and every movement and every day was an approximation. As his method referred every thing he did and thought to the end, and as his exertion did not relax for a moment, he made the trial,

so seldom made, what is the utmost effect which may be granted to the last possible efforts of a human agent : and therefore what he did not accomplish, he might conclude to be placed beyond the sphere of mortal activity, and calmly leave to the immediate disposal of Omnipotence.

Unless the eternal happiness of mankind be an insignificant concern, and the passion to promote it an inglorious distinction, I may cite George Whitefield, as a noble instance of this attribute of the decisive character, this intense necessity of action. The ardour of his mind carried him through a course of exertions which it would have fatigued a cotemporary biographer to record ; and at the same time threw into each of them a vehement eloquence, at which folly and wickedness were often alarmed as by the assault of a tempest. The great Cause which was so languid a thing in the hands of many of its advocates, assumed in his administrations an unmitigable urgency.

Many of the christian missionaries among the heathens, such as Brainerd, Elliot, and Schwartz, have displayed memorable examples of this dedication of their whole being to their office, this eternal abjuration of all the quiescent feelings.

This would be the proper place for introducing (if I did not hesitate to introduce in any connexion with merely human instances) the example of him who said, "I must be about my Father's business. My meat and drink is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

LETTER IV.

AFTER the illustrations on the last article, it will seem but a very slight transition, when I proceed to specify Courage as an

essential part of the decisive character. An intelligent man, adventurous only in thought, may sketch the most excellent scheme, and after duly admiring it, and himself as its author, may be reduced to say, What a noble spirit that would be which should dare to realize this ! A noble spirit ! is it I ? And his heart may answer in the negative, while he glances a mortified thought of inquiry round to recollect persons who would venture what he dares not, and almost hopes not to find them. Or if by extreme effort he has brought himself to a resolution of braving the difficulty, he is compelled to execrate the timid lingerings that still keep him back from the trial. A man endowed with the complete character, says, with a sober consciousness as remote from the spirit of bravado as it is from timidity, Thus, and thus, is my conviction and my determination ; now for the phantoms of fear ; let me look them in the face ; they will find I am not made of trembling materials : " I dare do all that may be-

come a man." I shall firmly confront every thing that threatens me in the prosecution of my purpose, and I am prepared to meet the consequences of it when it is accomplished. I should despise a being, though it were myself, whose agency could be held enslaved by the gloomy shapes of imagination, by the haunting recollections of a dream, by the whistling or the howling of winds, by the shriek of owls, by the shades of midnight, or by human words or frowns. I should be indignant to feel that in the commencement of an adventure I could think of nothing but the deep pit by the side of the way where I must walk, into which I may slide, the mad animal which it is not impossible that I may meet, or the assassin who may lurk in a thicket of yonder wood. And I disdain to compromise the interests that rouse me to action, for the privilege of a disgraceful security.

As the conduct of a decisive man is always individual, and often singular, it is

to be expected that the trial of courage will sometimes be great. For one thing, he may be encountered by the strongest disapprobation of many of his connexions, and the censure of the greater part of the society where he is known. In this case, it is not a man of common spirit that can shew himself just as at other times, and meet their anger in the same undisturbed manner as he would meet some slight inclemency of the weather; that can, without harshness or violence, continue to effect every moment some part of his design, coolly replying to each ungracious look and indignant voice, I am sorry to oppose you; I am not unfriendly to you, while thus persisting in what excites your displeasure; it would please me to have your approbation and concurrence, and I think I should have them if you would seriously consider my reasons; but meanwhile, I am superior to opinion, I am not to be intimidated by reproaches, nor would your favour and applause be any reward for the sacrifice of my object. As you can do without my

approbation, I can certainly do without yours; it is enough that I can approve myself, it is enough that I can appeal to the last authority in the creation. Amuse yourselves, as you may, by continuing to censure or to rail; *I* shall continue to act: I do not fear you; allow me to go on.

The attack of contempt and ridicule, is perhaps a still greater trial of courage. It is felt by all to be an admirable thing, when it can in no degree be ascribed to the hardness of either stupidity or confirmed depravity, to sustain for a considerable time, or in numerous instances, the looks of scorn, or an unrestrained shower of taunts and jeers, with a perfect composure, which shall immediately after, or even at the time, proceed on the business that provokes all this ridicule. This invincibility of temper will often make even the scoffers themselves tired of the sport: they begin to feel that against such a man it is a poor style of hostility to laugh. There is nothing that people are more mortified to spend in vain

than their scorn. Till however a man become a veteran, he must reckon on sometimes meeting this trial; and I instantly know—if I hear him anxiously reply, to an important suggestion of any measure to be adopted, But will they not laugh at me? I know—that he is not the person whom this essay attempts to describe. A man of the right kind would say, They will smile, they will laugh, will they? Much good may it do them. I have something else to do than to trouble myself about their mirth. I do not care if the whole neighbourhood were to laugh in a chorus. I should indeed be sorry to see or hear such a number of fools, but pleased enough to find that they did not consider me as one of their stamp. The good to result from my project will not be less, because vain and shallow minds that cannot understand it, are diverted at it and at me. What should I think of my pursuits, if every trivial thoughtless being could comprehend or would applaud them, and

of myself, if my courage needed levity and ignorance for their allies, or could shrink at their sneers?

I remember, that on reading the account of the project for conquering Peru, formed by Almagro, Pizarro, and De Luques, while abhorring the principle and the design of the men, I could not help admiring the hardihood of mind which made them regardless of scorn. These three individuals, before they had obtained any associates, or arms, or soldiers, or exactly knew the power of the kingdom which they were to conquer, celebrated a solemn mass in one of the great churches, as a pledge and a commencement of the enterprise, amidst the astonishment and contempt expressed by a multitude of people for what was deemed a monstrous project. They however proceeded through the service, and afterwards to their respective departments of preparation, with the most entire insensibility to all this triumphant scorn; and thus gave the first proof of possessing

that invincible firmness with which they afterwards prosecuted their design, till they attained at length a success over which humanity will for ever weep.

Milton's Abdiel is a noble illustration of the courage that defies scorn.

But in some of the situations where decision of character is to be evinced, a man will be threatened by evils of a darker aspect than disapprobation or contempt. He may apprehend serious sufferings; and very often, to dare as far as conscience or a great cause required, has been to dare to die. In almost all plans of great enterprise, a man must systematically dismiss, at the entrance, every wish to stipulate for safety with his destiny. He voluntarily treads within the precincts of danger, and though it is possible that he may escape, he ought to be prepared with the fortitude of a victim. This is the inevitable condition on which heroes, travellers or missionaries among savage nations, and reformers on a grand scale, must commence

their career. Either they must allay their fire of enterprise, or they must hold themselves in readiness to be exploded by it from the world.

The last decisive energy of a rational courage, which confides in the Supreme Power, is very sublime. It makes a man who intrepidly dares every thing that can oppose or attack him within the whole sphere of mortality ; who would retain his purpose unshaken amidst the ruins of the world ; who will still press toward his object while death is impending over him.

It was in the true elevation of this character that Luther, when cited to appear at the Diet of Worms, under an assurance of safety from very high authority, said to his friends, who conjured him not to go, and justly brought the example of John Huss, who, in a similar situation, and with the same pledge of protection, had notwithstanding been burnt alive, "I am called in the name of God to go, and I would go, though I were certain to meet as many

devils in Worms as there are tiles on the houses."

A reader of the bible will not forget Daniel, braving in calm devotion the decree which consigned him to the den of lions ; or Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, saying to the tyrant, " We are not careful to answer thee in this matter," when the furnace was in sight.

The combination of these several essential principles, constitutes that state of mind, which is the supreme requisite to decision of character, and perhaps its most striking distinction, that is, the full agreement of the mind with itself, the co-operation of all its powers, and all its dispositions.

What an unfortunate task it would be for a charioteer, who had harnessed a set of horses however strong, if he could not make them draw together : if, while one of them would go forward, another was restive, another tried to move back, and another started aside, what could be done ?

If even one of the four were unmanageably perverse, while the three were obedient, an aged beggar with his crutch might soon leave Phaeton behind. So in a human being, unless the chief forces act consentaneously, there can be no inflexible vigour, either of will or of execution. *One* dissentient principle in the mind, not only deducts so much from the strength and mass of its agency, but counteracts and embarrasses all the rest. If the judgment holds in low estimation that which yet the passions incline a man to pursue, his pursuit will be irregular and inconstant, though it may have occasional fits of animation, when those passions happen to be strongly stimulated. If there is an opposition between judgment and habit, though the man will probably continue to act mainly under the direction of habit in spite of his opinions, yet sometimes the intrusion of those opinions will have for the moment an effect like that of Prospero's wand on the limbs of Ferdinand; and to be

alternately impelled by habit, and checked by opinion, will be a state of vexatious debility. If two principal passions are opposite to each other, they will utterly distract the strongest mind. The one may be somewhat stronger than the other, and therefore just prevail barely enough to give a feeble impulse to the conduct of the man ; but no powerful impulse can be given, till the disparity of these two rivals becomes greater, in consequence of the gradual weight of habit, or the reinforcement supplied by some new impressions, being added to the preponderating passion. The disparity must be no less than an absolute predominance of the one and subjection of the other, before the prevailing passion will have at liberty, if I may so express it, any large measure of its force to throw activity into the system of conduct. If, for instance, a man feels at once the love of fame which is to be gained only by arduous exertions, and an equal degree of the love of pleasure which

precludes those exertions ; if he is ambitious to shew off in splendour, and yet anxious to save money ; if he has the curiosity of adventure, and yet that solicitude for his safety which forbids him to climb a precipice, descend into a cavern, or explore a dangerous wild ; if he has the stern will of a tyrant, and yet the relentings of a man ; if he has the ambition which would subdue his fellow-mortals, counteracted by the humanity which would not hurt them ; we can easily anticipate the irresolute contradictory style of his actions. Especially if conscience, that great troubler of the human breast, loudly declares against a man's wishes or projects, it will be a fatal enemy to decision, till it either reclaim the delinquent passions, or be debauched or murdered by them.

Lady Macbeth may be cited as a harmonious character, though the epithet seems strangely applied. She had capacity, ambition, and courage ; and she willed the death of the king. Macbeth had still more capacity, ambition, and courage ; and he

also willed the murder of the king. But he had, besides, humanity, generosity, conscience, and some measure of what forms the *power* of conscience, the fear of a superior Being. Consequently, when the dreadful moment approached, he felt an insupportable conflict between these opposite principles, and when it was arrived, his utmost courage failed. The worse part of his nature fell prostrate under the power of the better; the angel of goodness arrested the demon that grasped the dagger, and would have taken that dagger away, if the pure demoniac firmness of his wife, who had none of these counteracting principles, had not shamed and hardened him to the deed.

The poet's delineation of Richard III. (I better remember the poet's account of him than the historian's,) gives a dreadful specimen of this indivisibility, if I may so name it, of mental impulse. After his determination was fixed, his whole mind with the compactest fidelity supported

him in prosecuting it. Securely privileged from all interference of doubt that could linger, or humanity that could soften, or timidity that could shrink, he advanced with a grim concentrated constancy through scene after scene of atrocity, still fulfilling his vow to "cut his way through with a bloody axe." He did not waver while he pursued his object, nor relent when he seized it.

Cromwell (whom I mention as a parallel, not to Richard's depravity, but to his inflexible vigour) lost his mental consistency in the latter end of a career distinguished by as much decision as the world ever saw. It appears that the wish to be a king, at last arose in a mind which had execrated royalty, and battled it from the land. As far as he really had any republican principles and partialities, this new desire must have been a very uncomplacent associate for them, and must have produced a schism in the breast where all the strong forces of thought and passion had acted

till then in concord. The new form of ambition became just predominant enough to carry him by slow degrees through the embarrassment and the shame of this incongruity into an irresolute determination to assume the crown; so irresolute, that he was reduced again to a mortifying indecision by the remonstrances of some of his friends, which he could easily have slighted, and by an apprehension of the public disapprobation, which he could have braved, if some of the principles of his own mind had not shrunk or revolted from the design. When at last the motives for relinquishing this design prevailed, it was by so small a degree of preponderance, that his reluctant refusal of the offered crown was the voice only of half his soul.

Not only two distinct counteracting passions, but one passion interested for two objects, both equally desirable, but of which the one must be sacrificed, may annihilate in that instance the possibility of determined conduct. I recollect reading

in an old divine, a story from an older historian, applicable to this remark. A father went to the agents of a tyrant, to endeavour to redeem his two sons, military men, who with some other captives of war were condemned to die. He offered, as a ransom, to surrender his own life and a large sum of money. The tyrant's agents who had them in charge, informed him that this equivalent would be accepted for one of his sons, and for one only, because they should be accountable for the execution of two persons; he might therefore choose which he would redeem. Anxious to save even one of them thus at the expense of his own life, he yet was utterly unable to decide which should die, by choosing the other to live, and remained in the agony of this dilemma so long that they were both slain.

LETTER V.

IT were absurd to suppose that any human being can attain a state of mind capable

of acting in all instances invariably with the full power of determination ; but it is obvious that many have possessed an habitual and very commanding measure of it; and I am persuaded that the preceding remarks have taken account of its chief characteristics and constituent principles. A number of additional observations remain.

The slightest view of human affairs shews what fatal and ample mischief may be caused by men of this character, when misled or wicked. You have but to recollect the conquerors, despots, bigots, unjust conspirators, and signal villains of every class, who have blasted society by the relentless vigour which could act consistently and heroically wrong. Till therefore the virtue of mankind be greater, there is reason to be pleased that so few of them are endowed with extraordinary decision.

When this character is dignified by wisdom and principle, great care is yet required in the possessors of it to prevent it from becoming unamiable. As it in-

volves much practical assertion of superiority over other human beings, the manner ought to be as mild and conciliating as possible; else pride will feel provoked, affection hurt, and weakness oppressed. But this is not the manner which the man whom I am considering, will be naturally most inclined to wear. Rather, he will have a manner of sternness, reserve, and incomppliance. He will have the appearance of keeping himself always at a distance from social equality; and his friends will feel as if their friendship were continually sliding into subserviency, while his intimate connexions will think he does not attach the due importance either to their opinions or to their regard. His manner, when they differ from him, or complain, will be in danger of giving the impression of careless inattention, and sometimes of disdain.

When he can accomplish a design in his own person alone, he may separate himself to the work with the cold self-inclosed in-

dividuality on which no one has any hold, which seems to recognise no kindred being in the world, which takes little account of good wishes and kind concern, any more than it cares for opposition, which seeks neither aid nor sympathy, and which seems to say, I do not want any of you, and I am glad that I do not; leave me alone to succeed or die. This has a very repellent effect on the friends who wished to feel themselves of some little importance, in some way or other, to a person whom they are constrained to respect. When assistance is indispensable to his undertakings, his mode of signifying it will seem rather to command the co-operation than to invite it.

In consultation, his manner will indicate that when he is equally with the rest in possession of the circumstances of the case, he does not at all expect to hear any opinions that shall correct his own, but is satisfied that either his own conception of the subject is the just one, or that his own

mind must originate that which shall be so. This striking difference will be apparent between him and his associates, that *their* manner of receiving *his* opinions is that of agreement or dissent; *his* manner of receiving *theirs* is that of sanction or rejection. He has the tone of authoritatively deciding on what they say, but never of submitting to decision what himself says. Their coincidence with his views does not give him a firmer assurance of his being right, nor their dissent any other impression than that of their incapacity to judge. If his feeling took the distinct form of a reflection, it would be, Mine is the business of comprehending and devising, and I am here to rule this company, and not to consult them; I want their docility and not their arguments; I am come, not to seek their co-operation in thinking, but to induce their concurrence in executing what is already thought for them. Of course, many suggestions and reasons which appear important to those from whom

they come, will be disposed of by him with a transient attention, or a light facility, that will seem very disrespectful to persons who possibly hesitate to admit the full persuasion that he is a demi-god, and that they are but insects. Lord Chatham, in going out of the House of Commons, just as one of the speakers against him concluded his speech by emphatically urging what he perhaps rightly thought the unanswerable question, "*Where* can we find means to support such a war?" turned round a moment, and gaily replied, "Gentle shepherd, tell me where."

Even the assenting convictions, and practical compliances, yielded by degrees to this decisive man, may be somewhat undervalued; as they will appear to him no more than simply coming, and that perhaps very slowly, to a right apprehension; whereas himself understood and decided justly from the first, and has been right all this while.

He will be in danger of extending but

little tolerance to the prejudices, hesitation, and timidity, of those with whom he has to act. He will say to himself, I wish there were any thing like manhood among the beings called men; and that they could have the sense and spirit not to let themselves be hampered by so many silly notions and childish fears. Why cannot they either determine and proceed with some promptitude and vigour, or let me, that can, do it for them? Am I to wait till debility become strong, and folly wise? If full scope be allowed to these tendencies, they will make even a man of elevated virtue a tyrant, who, while he is conscious of the rectitude of his designs, will be regardless of every thing but the accomplishment of them. He will forget all respect for the feelings and liberties of beings who are to be regarded as but a subordinate machinery, to be actuated, or to be thrown aside when not actuated, by the spring of his commanding spirit.

I have before asserted that this strong

character may be exhibited with a mildness of manner, and that it will thus best secure its efficacy. But this mildness must often be at the cost of great effort; and how much considerate policy or benevolent forbearance it will require, for a man to exert his utmost vigour in the very task, as it will appear to him at the time, of cramping that vigour! Lycurgus appears to have been a high example of mild patience in the firm prosecution of designs which were to be effected among a perverse multitude.

It is probable that the men most distinguished for decision, have not, in general, possessed a large share of tenderness; and it is easy to imagine that the laws according to which our nature is formed, will with great difficulty allow the combination of the refined sensibilities with a hardy, never-shrinking, never-yielding constancy. Is it not almost of the essence of this constancy to be free from even the *perception* of such impressions as cause a

mind, weak through susceptibility, to relax or to waver; just as the skin of the elephant, or the armour of the rhinoceros, would scarcely even feel the application of a force by which a small animal, with a skin of thin and delicate texture, would be pierced or lacerated to death? No doubt, this firmness consists partly in overcoming feelings, but it may consist partly too in not having them. To be tremblingly alive to gentle impressions, and yet to be able to preserve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immovable heart, amidst even the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it is the utmost and the rarest endowment of humanity.

If you take a view of the first rank of decisive men, you will observe that their faculties have been too much bent to arduous effort, their souls have been kept in too military an attitude, they have been begirt with too much iron, for the melting

movements of the heart. Their whole being appears too much arrogated and occupied by the spirit of severe design, compelling them to work systematically toward some defined end, to be sufficiently at ease for the indolent complacency, the soft lassitude, of gentle affections, which love to surrender themselves to the present felicities, forgetful of all "enterprises of great pith and moment." The man seems rigorously intent still on his own affairs, as he walks, or regales, or mingles with domestic society; and appears to despise all the feelings that will not take rank with the grave labours and decisions of intellect, or coalesce with the unremitting passion which is his spring of action: he values not feelings which he cannot employ either as weapons or as engines. He loves to be actuated by a passion so strong as to compel into exercise the utmost force of his being, and fix him in a tone, compared with which, the gentle affections, if he had felt them, would be ac-

counted tameness, and their exciting causes, insipidity.

Yet we cannot willingly allow that tenderness is totally incompatible with the most impregnable inflexibility that can exist in the world ; nor can we help believing that such men as Timoleon, Alfred, and Gustavus Adolphus, must have been very fascinating domestic associates, whenever the urgency of their affairs would allow them to withdraw from the interests of statesmen and warriors, to indulge the affections of men : most fascinating, for, with a relative or friend who had any perceptions, all the value of their stronger character would be recognised in the gentler one ; the man whom nothing could subdue, would exalt the quality of the tenderness which softened him to recline.

But it were much easier to enumerate a long train of ancient and modern names of men who have had the decision without the softness. Perhaps indeed they have yielded sometimes to some species of love,

as a mode of amusing their passions for an interval, till greater engagements have summoned them into their proper element; when they have shewn how little the sentiment ever belonged to the heart, by the ease with which they could relinquish the temporary favourite. In other cases, where there have not been the selfish inducements, which this passion supplies, to the exhibition of something like tenderness, and where they have been left to the pure sympathies of humanity alone, no rock on the face of the earth could be harder.

The late celebrated King of Prussia occurs to me at this moment, as a capital instance of the decisive character; and there occurs to me, at the same time, one of the anecdotes of his life. Intending to make, in the night, an important movement in his camp, which was in sight of the enemy, he gave orders that by eight o'clock all the lights in the camp should be put out, on pain of death. The moment that the time

was past, he walked out himself to see whether all were dark. He found a light in the tent of a Captain Zietern, which he entered just as the officer was folding up a letter. Zietern knew him, and instantly fell on his knees to entreat his mercy: The king asked to whom he had been writing; he said it was a letter to his wife, which he had retained the candle these few minutes beyond the time in order to finish. The king coolly ordered him to rise, and write one line more, which he should dictate. This line was to inform his wife, without any explanation, that by such an hour the next day, he should be a dead man. The letter was then sealed, and dispatched as it had been intended; and, the next day, the captain was executed. I say nothing of the justice of the punishment itself; but this cool barbarity to the affection both of the officer and his wife, was enough to brand the character indelibly. It proved how little the philosopher and decisive hero was susceptible of such

an affection, or capable of sympathizing with its pains.

At the same time, it is proper to observe, that the case may easily occur, in which a man *must* be resolute to act in a manner which may make him appear to want the finer feelings. He must do what he knows will cause pain to persons who will feel it severely. He may be obliged to resist affectionate wishes, expostulations, entreaties, and tears. Take this same instance. If the wife of Zieten had come to supplicate for him, not only the remission of the punishment of death, but an exemption from any other severe punishment, which was perhaps justly due to the violation of such an order, on so important an occasion, it had then probably been the duty and the virtue of the commander to deny the most interesting suppliant, and to resist the most pathetic appeals which could have been made to his feelings.

LETTER VI.

VARIOUS assignable circumstances may contribute much to confirm the character in question. I shall just notice two or three.

And first, *opposition*. The passions which inspire men to resistance, and sustain them in it, such as anger, indignation, and resentment, are evidently far stronger than those which have reference to friendly objects; and if any of these strong passions are frequently excited by opposition, they infuse a certain quality into the general temperament of the mind, which remains after the immediate excitement is past. They continually strengthen the principle of re-action; they put the mind in the habitual array of defence and self-assertion, and often give it the aspect and the posture of a gladiator, when there appears no confronting combatant. When these pas-

sions are felt by the man whom I describe, it is probable that each excitement is followed by a greater increase of this principle of re-action than in other men, because this result is so congenial with his naturally resolute disposition. Let him be opposed then, through the whole course of an extended design, or in the general tenour of his actions; and this constant opposition would render him the service of an ally by corroborating his inflexibility. An irresolute mind indeed might be quelled and subjugated by a formidable kind of opposition; but the strong wind which blows out a taper, augments a powerful fire, if there is fuel enough, to an indefinite intensity.

I believe you will find in fact that many of the individuals most eminently decisive in conduct, have made their way through opposition and contest, in which they have acquired both a prompt acuteness of faculty, and an inflexibility of temper, which even strong minds could never have

attained in the tame security of facile friendly coincidence. Very often however, it is granted, the firmness matured by such discipline, is accompanied, in a man of virtue, with a Catonic severity, and in a mere man of the world; with an unhumanized repulsive hardness..

Desertion is another cause which may conduce to consolidate this character. A kind mutually reclining dependence, is certainly the happiest state of human beings; but this necessarily prevents the developement of some great individual powers which would be forced into action by a state of desertion. I lately noticed, with some surprise, an ivy, which being prevented from attaching itself to the rock beyond a certain point, had shot off into a bold elastic stem, with an air of as much independence as any branch of oak in the vicinity. So a human being, thrown, whether by cruelty, justice, or accident, from all social support and kindness, if he has any vigour of spirit, and is not in the bodily

debility of either childhood or age, will instantly begin to act for himself with a resolution which will appear like a new faculty. And the most absolute inflexibility is likely to characterise the resolution of an individual who is obliged to deliberate without consultation, and execute without assistance. He will disdain to concede to beings that have rejected him, or to forego a single particle of his designs or advantages for the sake of the opinions or the will of all the world. Himself, his pursuits, and his interests, are emphatically his own. "The world is not his friend, nor the world's law," and therefore he becomes regardless of every thing but its power. If this person has but little humanity or principle, he will become a misanthrope, or perhaps a villain, that will resemble a solitary wild beast of the night, which makes prey of every thing it can overpower, and cares for nothing but fire.

If he is capable of grand conception.

and enterprise, he may, like Spartacus, make a daring attempt against the whole social order of the state where he has been oppressed. If he has great humanity and principle, he may become one of the noblest of mankind, and display a generous virtue to which society had no claim, and which it is not worthy to reward, if it should at last become inclined. No, he will say, give your rewards to another; as it has been no part of my object to gain them, they are not necessary to my satisfaction. I have done good, without expecting your gratitude, and without caring for your approbation. If conscience and my Creator had not been more auspicious than you, none of these virtues would ever have opened to the day. When I ought to have been an object of your compassion, I might have perished; now, when you find I can serve your interests, you will affect to acknowledge me and reward me; I will not accept your rewards—In either case, virtuous or wicked, the man who has been

compelled to do without assistance, will spurn interference.

Common life would supply illustrations of the effect of desertion. A number of resolute men have become such, partly from being left friendless in early life. The case has also sometimes happened, that a wife and mother, remarkable perhaps for gentleness and acquiescence before, has been compelled, after the death of the husband on whom she depended, and when she has met with nothing but neglect or unkindness from relatives and those who had been deemed friends, to adopt a plan of her own, and has executed it with a resolution which has astonished even herself.

I am sorry that the signal examples which occur to my memory under this article, whether real or fictitious, are still of the depraved order. I fancy myself to see Marius sitting on the ruins of Carthage, where no arch or column that remained unshaken amidst the desolation, could present a

stronger image of a firmness beyond the power of calamitous events to subdue. The rigid constancy which had before distinguished his character, would be aggravated by his finding himself thus an outcast from all human society; and he would proudly shake off every sentiment that had ever for an instant checked his designs by reminding him of social obligations. The lonely individual was placed in the alternative of becoming the victim or the antagonist of the power of the empire. While with a spirit capable of confronting that power, he probably amidst those ruins resolved on a great experiment, he would enjoy a kind of sullen luxury in surveying the dreary situation, and recollecting the circumstances of his expulsion; since they would seem to him to sanction an unlimited vengeance, to present what had been his country as the pure legitimate prize for desperate achievement, and to give him a proud consequence in being reduced singly to maintain a quarrel against mankind. He

would exult that his desolate condition gave him a proof of his possessing a mind which no misfortunes could repress or intimidate, and that it kindled an animosity intense enough to force that mind from firm endurance into impetuous action. He would feel as if he became stronger for enterprise, in proportion as he became more inexorable ; and the sentiment with which he quitted his solitude would be, Rome expelled her patriot, let her receive her evil genius.

The decision of Satan, in *Paradise Lost*, is represented as consolidated by his reflections on his hopeless banishment from heaven, which oppress him with sadness for a moment, but he soon resumes his invincible tone, and utters the impious but sublime sentiment.

“ What matter where, if I be still the same ? ”

You remember how this effect of desertion is represented in that most striking combination of qualities, perhaps, that poetry ever embodied in one human indi-

vidual, Charles de Moor. His father's supposed cruel rejection consigned him irretrievably to the career of atrocious enterprise, in which, notwithstanding the most interesting emotions of humanity and tenderness, he persisted with heroic determination till he considered his destiny as accomplished.

Success tends considerably to reinforce this character. It is true that a man possessing it in a high degree will not lose it by occasional failure; for if the failure was caused by something entirely beyond the reach of all human knowledge and ability, he will remember that fortitude is the virtue required in meeting unfavourable events which in no sense depended on him; if by something which *might* have been known and prevented, he will feel that even the experience of failure augments his competence, by admonishing his prudence, and enlarging his understanding. But as all schemes and measures of action have reference to some end; and if wise, are cor-

rectly adapted to attain that end, continual failure would shew something essentially wrong in a man's system, and either destroy his confidence, or prove it to be mere absurdity or obstinacy. On the contrary, when a man has ascertained by experiment the justness of his calculations and the extent of his powers, when he has measured his force with various persons, when he has braved and conquered difficulty, and partly seized the prize, he will advance with increasing assurance to the trials which still await him.

In some men whose lives have been spent in constant perils, continued success has produced a confidence beyond its rational effect, by inspiring a persuasion that the common laws of human affairs were, in their case, superseded by the decrees of a peculiar destiny, securing them from the possibility of disaster; and this superstitious feeling, though it has displaced the unconquerable resolution from its rational basis, has yet often produced the most

wonderful effects. This persuasion dictated Cæsar's expression to the mariner who was terrified at the storm and billows, "What art thou afraid of? Thy vessel carries Cæsar." This idea had some influence among the intrepid men in the time of the English Commonwealth.

The wilfulness of an obstinate person is sometimes fortified by some single instance of remarkable success in his undertakings, which is promptly recalled in every case where his decisions are questioned or opposed, as a proof that he must in this instance too be right; especially if that one success happened contrary to your predictions.

I shall only add, and without illustration, that the habit of associating with *inferiors*, among whom a man can always, and therefore does always, take the lead, is very conducive to a subordinate kind of decision of character. You may see this exemplified any day in an ignorant country squire among his vassals; especially if he wears

the superadded majesty of Justice of the Peace.

In viewing the characters and actions of the men who have possessed the supreme degree of the quality which I have attempted to describe, one cannot but wish it were possible to know how much of this astonishing superiority was created by the circumstances in which they were placed; but it seems inevitable to believe that there was some vast difference from ordinary men in the very structure of the mind. In observing lately a man who appeared too vacant almost to think of a purpose, too indifferent to resolve upon it, and too sluggish to execute it if he had resolved, I was distinctly struck with the idea of the difference between him and Marius, of whom I happened to have been thinking; and I felt it utterly beyond my power to believe that any circumstances on earth, though ever so perfectly combined and adapted, would have produced in this man, if placed under their fullest influence from

his childhood, any resemblance (beyond perhaps a diminutive kind of revenge and cruelty) of the formidable Roman.

It is needless to discuss whether a person who is practically evinced, at the age of maturity, to want the essential stamina of this character, can, by any process, acquire it. Indeed such a person cannot have sufficient force of *will* to make the complete experiment. If there is the unconquerable *will* that would persist to seize all possible means, and apply them in order to attain such an end, it would prove the existence already of a high degree of the character sought; and if there is not this *will*, how then is the supposed attainment possible?

Yet though it is improbable that a very irresolute man can ever become an habitually decisive one, it should be observed, that as there are many degrees of determined character, and some very defective ones, it might be possible to apply a discipline which should advance a man from the

first degree to the second, and from that to the third, and how much further I cannot tell; he may try. I have but a very imperfect conception of the discipline; I will suggest a hint or two.

And in the first place, the indispensable necessity of a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the concerns before us, seems too obvious for remark; and yet perhaps no man has been sufficiently sensible of it, till he has been placed in circumstances which forced him to act, before he had time, or after he had made ineffectual efforts, to obtain the needful information. The pain of having brought things to an unfortunate issue, is hardly greater than that of proceeding in the conscious ignorance which continually threatens such an issue. While thus proceeding under the constraint of necessity, and without plan or guide, a man looks round for information as eagerly as a benighted wanderer would for the light of a human dwelling. He perhaps labours to recall what he thinks

he once heard or read in relation to a similar situation, without dreaming, at the time he heard or read it, that such instruction could ever be of importance to him ; and is distressed to find that he cannot accurately recollect it. He would give a considerable sum, if some particular book could be brought to him at the instant. He thinks how many people know, without its being of any use to them, exactly what could be of such important service to him, if he could know it. In some cases, a line, a sentence, a monosyllable of affirming or denying, or a momentary sight of an object, would be inexpressibly valuable and welcome. And he resolves that if he can once happily escape from the present difficulty, he will apply himself day and night to obtain knowledge rather than be so involved and harassed again. It might even be of service to have been occasionally forced to act under the disadvantage of conscious ignorance, if the affair was not very important, nor the consequence very

injurious, as an effectual lesson on the necessity of knowledge in order to decision either of plan or of execution. It is indeed a most extreme case that will compel a considerate man to act without knowledge; yet he may often be necessitated to proceed to action, when he is sensible his information does not extend to the whole of the concern in which he is going to commit himself. And in this case, he will feel no little uneasiness, even while transacting that part of it in which his knowledge is competent, when he looks forward to the point where that knowledge terminates; unless he is conscious of a very prompt faculty of catching information at the moment that he wants it for use, as Indians set out on a long journey with but a small stock of provision, because they are certain that their bows or guns will procure it by the way. It is one of the nicest points of wisdom to decide how much less than complete knowledge, in any question of practical interest, will warrant a man to ven-

ture on an undertaking, in the presumption that the deficiency will be supplied in time to prevent either perplexity or disaster.

A thousand familiar instances show the effect of perfect knowledge on determination. An artisan may be said to be decisive as to the mode of working a piece of iron or wood, because he is certain of the proper process and the effect. A man perfectly acquainted with the intricate paths of a district, selects the right path with a satisfied instantaneous promptitude ; while a stranger who has only some very vague information, is lost in perplexity. It is easy to imagine what a number of circumstances may occur in the course of a life or even of a year, in which a man cannot thus readily determine, and thus confidently proceed, without an extent and an exactness of knowledge which few persons have application enough to acquire.

In connexion with the necessity of knowledge, I would suggest the import-

ance of cultivating, with the utmost effort, a conclusive manner of reasoning. In the first place; let the general course of thinking *be* reasoning; for it should be remembered that this name does not belong to a series of thoughts and fancies which follow one another without deduction or dependence, and which can therefore no more bring a subject to a proper issue, than a number of separate links will answer the mechanical purpose of a chain. The conclusion which terminates such a series, does not deserve the name of *result*, since it has little more than a casual connexion with what went before; the conclusion might as well have taken place at an earlier point of the train, or have been deferred till that train had been extended much further. Instead of having been busily employed in this kind of thinking, for perhaps many hours, a man might as well have been sleeping all the time, since the single thought which is now to determine his conduct, might have

happened to be the first thought that occurred to him on awaking. It only *happens* to occur to him now ; it does not follow from what he has been thinking all these hours ; at least, he cannot prove that some other thought might not just as properly have come in its place, at the end of this long series. It is easy to see how feeble that determination is likely to be, which is formed on so narrow a ground as the last accidental idea that comes into the mind, or on so loose a ground as this crude uncombined assemblage of ideas. Indeed it is difficult to form a determination at all on such slight ground. A man delays, and waits for some more satisfactory thought to occur to him ; and perhaps he has not waited long, before an idea arises in his mind of a quite contrary tendency to the last. As this additional idea is not, more than that which preceded it, the result of any process of reasoning, nor brings with it any arguments, it is likely to give place soon to another, and

yet another ; and they are all in succession of equal authority, that is, of none. If at last an idea occurs to him which seems of considerable authority, he may here make a stand, and adopt his resolution, with firmness, as he thinks, and commence the execution. But still, as he cannot *verify* the authority of the principle which has determined him, his resolution is likely to prove treacherous and evanescent in any serious trial. A principle so little defined and established by sound reasoning, is not terra firma for a man to trust himself upon ; it is only as a slight incrustation on a yielding element ; it is like the sand on the surface of the lake Serbonis, which broke away under the unfortunate army which had begun to advance on it, mistaking it for solid ground.—These remarks may seem to refer only to a *single instance* of deliberation ; but they are equally applicable to all the deliberations and undertakings of a man's life : the same closely connected manner of thinking,

which is so necessary to give firmness of determination and of conduct in a particular instance, will, if habitual, greatly contribute to form a decisive character.

Not only should thinking be thus reduced, by a rigid discipline, to a train, in which all the parts at once depend upon and support one another, but also this train should be followed on to a full conclusion. It should be held as an absolute law, that the question must be disposed of before it is let alone. The mind may carry on this accurate process to some length, and then stop through indolence, or divert through levity; but it can never possess that rational confidence in its opinions which is requisite to the character in question, till it is conscious of acquiring them from trains of reasoning which are completely followed to their result. The habit of thinking thus completely is indispensable to the character in general; and in any particular instance, it is found that short pieces of trains of reasoning, though

correct as far as they go, are inadequate to qualify a man for the immediate concern. They are besides of little value for the assistance of future thinking ; because from being left thus incomplete, they are but slightly retained by the mind, and soon sink away ; in the same manner as walls left unfinished speedily moulder.

After these remarks, I should take occasion to observe, that a vigorous exercise of thought may sometimes for a while seem to increase the difficulty of decision, by discovering a great number of unthought-of reasons for a measure and against it, so that even a discriminating mind may during a short space find itself in the state of the magnetic needle under the equator. But no case in the world can really have this perfect equality of opposite reasons, nor will it long appear to have it, in the estimate of a clear and strongly exerted intellect, which after some time will ascertain, though the difference is small, which side of the ques-

tion has twenty, and which has but nineteen.

Another thing that would powerfully assist toward complete decision, both in the particular instance, and in the general spirit of the character, is for a man to place himself in a situation like that in which Cæsar placed his soldiers, when he burnt the ships which brought them to land. If his judgment is *really* decided, let him commit himself irretrievably by doing something which shall compel him to do more, which shall necessitate him to do all. If a man resolves as a general intention to be a philanthropist, I would say to him, Form some actual plan of philanthropy, and begin the execution of it to-morrow, (I should say *to-day*,) so explicitly, that you cannot relinquish it without becoming despicable even in your own estimation. If a man would be a hero, let him, if it is possible to find a good cause in arms, go instantly to the camp. If a man would be a traveller through

distant countries, let him actually prepare to set off. Let him not still dwell, in imagination, on mountains, rivers, and temples, but give directions about his remittances, his clothes, or the carriage, or the vessel, in which he is to go. Ledyard surprised the official person who asked him how soon he could be ready to set off for the interior of Africa, by replying promptly and firmly, "To-morrow."

Again, it is highly conducive to a manly firmness, that the interests in which it is exerted, should be of a dignified order, so as to give the passions an ample scope, and a noble object. The degradation that should devote these passions to mean and trivial pursuits, would in general, I should think, likewise debilitate their energy, and therefore preclude strength of character.

And finally, if I would repeat that one should think a man's own conscientious approbation of his conduct must be of vast importance to his decision in the outset, and his persevering constancy, I must at

the same time acknowledge that it is astonishing to observe how many of the eminent examples have been very wicked men. These must certainly be deemed also examples of the original want, or the depravation, or the destruction, of the moral sense.

I am sorry, and I attribute it to defect of memory, that a greater proportion of the illustrations which I have introduced, are not as conspicuous for goodness as for power. It is melancholy to contemplate beings, whom our imagination represents as capable, (when they possessed great external means in addition to the force of their minds,) of the grandest utility, capable of vindicating each good cause which has languished in a world adverse to all goodness, and capable of intimidating the collective vices of a nation or an age—becoming themselves the very centres and volcanoes of those vices; and it is melancholy to follow them in serious thought from this region, of which not all the

powers and difficulties and inhabitants together could have subdued their adamant resolution, to the Supreme Tribunal where that resolution must tremble and melt away:

ESSAY III.

On the Application of the Epithet Romantic.

LETTER I.

My dear Friend,

A THOUGHTFUL judge of sentiments, books, and men, will often find reason to regret that the language of censure is so easy and so undefined. It costs no labour, and needs no intellect, to pronounce the words, foolish, stupid, dull, odious, absurd, ridiculous. The weakest or most uncultivated mind may therefore gratify its vanity, laziness, and malice, all at once, by a prompt application of vague condemnatory words, where a wise and liberal man would not feel himself warranted to pronounce without the most deliberate consideration, and where such consideration might perhaps terminate in applause.

Thus the most excellent performances, whether in the department of thinking or of action, might be consigned to contempt, if there were no better judges, on the authority of those who could not even understand them. A man who wishes some decency and sense to prevail in the circulation of opinions, will do well, when he hears these decisions of ignorant arrogance, to call for a precise explication of the manner in which the terms apply to the subject.

There is a competent number of words for this use of cheap censure; but though a man deems himself to be giving no mean proof of sagacity in this confident readiness to condemn, even with this impotence of language, he may however have a certain consciousness that there is, in some other minds, a keen dexterity which would find expressions to bite harder than the words, dull, stupid, and ridiculous, which he is repeating many times to compensate for the incapacity of hitting off

the right thing at once. These vague epithets describe nothing, discriminate nothing; they express no species, are as applicable to ten thousand things as to this one, and he has before employed them on a numberless diversity of subjects. But he can perceive that censure or contempt has the smartest effect, when its expressions have an appropriate peculiarity, which adapts them more precisely to the present subject than to another, and he is therefore not quite satisfied with the expressions which say "about it and about it," but do not say the thing itself, which rather shew his mischievous will than prove his mischievous power. He wants words and phrases which would make the edge of his clumsy meaning fall just where it ought. Yes, he wants words; for his meaning is sharp, he knows, if only the words would come, Discriminative censure must be conveyed, either in a sentence which expresses some marked and acute turn of thought, in-

stead of simply applying an epithet, or in an epithet so specifically appropriate, that the single word is sufficient to fix the condemnation by the mere precision with which it describes. But as the censurer perhaps cannot succeed in either of these ways, he is willing to seek some other resource. And he may often find it in cant terms, which have a more spiteful force, and seem to have more particularity of meaning, than plain common words, without needing any shrewdness for their application. Each of these is supposed to denominate some one class or character of scorned or reprobated things, but leaves it so imperfectly defined, that dull malice may venture to assign to the class any thing which it would desire to throw under the odium of the denomination. Such words serve for a mode of collective execution, somewhat like the vessels which, in a season of outrage in a neighbouring country, received a promiscuous crowd of reputed criminals, of unexamined and

dubious similarity, and were then sunk in the flood. You cannot wonder that such compendious words of decision, which can give quick vent to crude impatient censure, emit plenty of antipathy in a few syllables, and save the condemner the difficulty of telling exactly what he wants to mean, should have had an extensive circulation.

Puritan was, doubtless, welcomed as a term of most lucky invention, when it was first applied in contempt to a class of men, of whom the world was not worthy. Its peculiarity gave it almost such an advantage as that of a proper name, among the lumber of common words by which they were described and reviled; while yet it meant any thing, every thing, which the vain world disliked in the devout character. The genius who first struck it out would feel that he had done something better than his companions, after they had perfectly tired themselves with repeating the meagre detail, "demure rogues,"

“ sanctimonious pretenders,” “ formal hypocrites.”

This term has long since lost its point, and is almost forgotten ; but some word of a similar cast was indispensably necessary to the vulgar of both kinds. The vain and malignant spirit which had decried the elevated piety of the Puritans, sought about (as Milton describes the wicked one in paradise) for some convenient form in which it might again come forth to hiss at zealous christianity, and in another lucky moment fell on the term *Methodist*. If there is no *sense* in the word, as now applied, there seems however to be a great deal of aptitude and execution. It has the advantage of being comprehensive as a general denomination, and yet opprobrious as a special badge, for every thing that ignorance and folly may mistake for fanaticism, or that malice may wilfully assign to it. Whenever a grave formalist feels it his duty to sneer at those operations of religion on the pas-

sions, which he never felt, he has only to call them *methodistical*; and notwithstanding that the word is both so trite and so vague, he feels as if he had uttered a good pungent thing. There is satiric smartness in the word, though there be none in the man. In default of keen faculty in the mind, it is delightful thus to find something that will do as well, ready bottled up in odd terms. It is not less convenient to a profligate, or a coxcomb, whose propriety of character is to be supported by laughing indiscriminately at religion in every form; the one, to evince that his courage is not sapped by conscience, the other, to make the best advantage of his instinct of catching at impiety as a substitute for sense. The word *Methodism* so readily sets aside all religion as superstitious folly, that they pronounce it with an air as if no more needed to be said. Such terms have a pleasant facility of throwing away the matter in question to scorn, without any

trouble of making a definite intelligible charge of extravagance or delusion, and attempting to prove it.

In politics, *Jacobinism* has, of late years, been the brand by which all sentiments alluding to the principles of liberty, in a way that could be taken to censure the measures of the ascendant party in the State, have been consigned to execration. What a quantity of noisy zeal would have been quashed in dead silence, if it had been possible to enforce the substitution of statements and definitions for this unmeaning, vulgar, but most efficacious term of reproach. What a number of persons have vented the super-abundance of their fidelity, or their rancour, by means of this and two or three similar words, who, if by some sudden lapse of memory they had lost these two or three words, and a few names of persons, would have looked round with an idiotic vacancy, totally at a loss what was the *subject* of their anger or their approbation. One may here catch a

glimpse of the policy of men of a superior class, in employing these terms as much as the vulgar, in order to keep them in active currency. If a rude populace, whose understandings they despise, and do not wish to improve, could not be excited and kept up to loyal animosity, but by means of a clear comprehension of what they were to oppose, and why, a political party would have but feeble hold on popular zeal, and might vociferate, and intrigue, and fret itself to nothing. But if a single word can be made the symbol of all that is absurd and execrable, so that the very sound of it shall irritate the passions of this ignorant and scorned multitude, as dogs have been taught to bark at the name of a neighbouring tyrant, it is a commodious thing for managing these passions to serve the interests of those who despise, while they flatter, their duped auxiliaries. The popular passions are the imps and demons of the political conjuror, and he can raise them, as other con-

jurors affect to do theirs, by terms of gibberish.

The epithet *romantic* has obviously no similarity to these words in its coinage, but it is considerably like them in the mode and effect of its application. For having partly quitted the rank of plain epithets, it has become a convenient exploding word, of more special deriding significance than the other words of its order, such as wild, extravagant, visionary. It is a standard expression of contemptuous dispatch, which you have often heard pronounced with a very self-complacent air, that said, "How much wiser I am than some people," by the indolent and inanimate on what they deemed impracticable, by the apes of prudence on what they accounted foolishly adventurous, and by the slaves of custom on what startled them as singular. The class of absurdities which it denominates, is left so undefined, that all the views and sentiments which a narrow cold mind could not

like or understand in an ample and fervid one, might be referred hither; and yet the word *seems* to discriminate their character so conclusively as to put them out of argument. With this cast of significance, and vacancy of sense, it is allowed to depreciate without being accountable; it has the license of a parrot, to call names without being taxed with insolence. And when any sentiments are decisively stigmatized with this denomination, it would require considerable courage to rescue and defend them; for as the epithet *romantic* is always understood to deny sound reason to whatever it is fixed upon, the advocate may expect to be himself enrolled among the heroes of whom Don Quixote is the time immemorial commander-in-chief. At least he may be assigned to that class which occupies a dubious frontier space between the rational and the insane.

If however the suggestions and sketches which I had endeavoured to exhibit as interesting and practicable, were attempted

to be turned into vanity and "thin air" by the enunciation of this epithet, I would say, Pray now what do you mean by *romantic*? Have you, as you pronounce it, a very precise conception in your mind, which you can give in some other words, and then distinctly fix the charge? Or is this a word, which, because it is often used in some such way as you now use it, may be left to tell its own meaning better than the speaker knows how to explain it? Or perhaps you mean that the ideas which I am expressing, associate in your mind with the fantastic images of romance, and that you cannot help thinking of enchanted castles, encounters with giants, solemn exorcisms, fortunate surprises, knight and wizards, dragons and griffins. You cannot exactly distinguish what the absurdity in my notions *is*, but you fancy what it is *like*. You therefore condemn it, not by giving a definition, but by applying an epithet which assigns it to a class of things already condemned; for

evidently the epithet should signify a resemblance to what we have condemned in the works of romance. Well then, take advantage of this resemblance, to bring your censure into a discriminative form. Explain with precision the chief points in which the absurdity of the works of romance has consisted, and then shew how the same distinctions characterize my notions or schemes. I will then renounce at once all my visionary follies, and be henceforward at least a very sober, if I cannot be a very rational man.

The great general distinction of those works has been the ascendancy of imagination over judgment. And the description is correct as applied to the books, even if the writers of them had the best judgments in the world. If they chose, for their amusement, to lay a sound judgment awhile to rest, to stimulate their imagination to the wildest extravagances, and to write them as they went on, the book would be nearly the same thing as if pro-

duced by a mind in which sound judgment had no place; it would be a *practical* ascendancy of imagination, though not a necessary one. It was a different case, if a writer kept his judgment active, amidst these extravagances, for the very purpose of managing and directing them to some particular end, of satire or sober truth. But however, the romances of the ages of chivalry and the preceding times, were not composed in either of these states of the understanding. They were the productions neither of men who, possessing a strong judgment, chose formally to forego its exercise, in order to riot awhile in scenes of extravagant fancy, only keeping that judgment so far awake as to retain a continual consciousness in what degree they *were* extravagant; nor of men who were dexterously aiming at some intellectual or moral purpose. It is evident that their minds were under the real and permanent ascendancy of imagination; and though they must have per-

ceived that the operations of this faculty went to an excess in some of its wildest flights, yet it might reach a very great degree of extravagance without their being conscious of any excess at all. They did not perceive any want of consistency and probability in descriptions of objects, and narrations of actions, which a sound judgment would have convicted of monstrous absurdity. This great mental defect was also a distinction of the age in which they wrote. The understanding of Cervantes clearly saw the whole extent of this mental defect in the writers and the age, and represented and corrected it by exhibiting a specimen of a still more ludicrous and excessive prevalence of imagination over judgment. Serious romance was however in some form to be retained, and has been the work of many writers who were not altogether beguiled out of their understanding by their fancy. Yet still it has retained a measure of its ancient character; it would not *be* romance without such a

degree of the marvellous as a cool judgment with difficulty admits to be probable or possible. The ascendancy of imagination over judgment therefore, as being the great distinction of these works, must be, in human character also, the foundation of whatever is justly denominated romantic. A man possessing so strong a judgment, and so subordinate a fancy, as Dean Swift, would hardly have been made romantic, if he had lived amidst the pomp and adventures of chivalry, and studied all the books in Don Quixote's library.

The absence of that clear understanding which precludes every romantic tendency, by discerning things as they really are, does not necessarily produce a romantic character, since imagination may be deficient also; and this double and equal deficiency produces mere dullness. But it is obvious that a weak judgment may be accompanied by a great force of that faculty which can powerfully assert itself even in childhood, in dreams, and in the state of insanity.

An understanding which might not, if combined with less imagination, exactly deserve the imputation of debility, may yet be practically reduced to this state by a disproportionate imagination, which continually invades its sphere, and takes every thing out of its hands. And then the case is made worse by the unfortunate circumstance, that the exercise of the faculty which should be repressed, is incomparably more easy and delightful, than of that which should be promoted. Indeed the term *exercise* is hardly applicable to the activity of a faculty, which can be active without effort, which is so far from needing to be stimulated to its works of magic, that it often scorns the most serious injunctions to forbear. It is not exercise, but indulgence; and even minds possessing much of the power of understanding, may be disposed to undergo but little of the labour of it, when amidst the ease of deepest indolence they can revel in the activity of a more

animating employment. Imagination may be indulged till it usurp an entire ascendancy over the mind, and then every subject presented to that mind will excite imagination, instead of understanding, to work; imagination will throw its colours where the intellectual faculty ought to draw its lines; imagination will accumulate metaphors where reason ought to deduce arguments; images will take the place of thoughts, and scenes of disquisitions. The whole mind may become at length something like a hemisphere of cloud-scenery, filled with an ever-moving train of changing melting forms, of every colour, mingled with rainbows, meteors, and an occasional gleam of pure sunlight, all vanishing away, the mental like this natural imagery, when its hour is up, without leaving any thing behind but the wish to recover the vision. And yet, the while, this series of visions, may be mistaken for operations of thought, and each cloudy image be admitted in the place of a proposition or a reason; or it

may even be mistaken for something sublimer than thinking. The influence of this habit of dwelling on the beautiful fallacious forms of imagination, will accompany the mind into the most serious speculations, or rather musings, on the real world, and what is to be done in it, and expected; just as the image, which the eye acquires from looking at any dazzling object, still appears before it wherever it turns. The vulgar materials that constitute the actual economy of the world, will rise up to its sight in fictitious forms, which it cannot disenchant into plain reality, nor will even suspect to be deceptive. It cannot go about with sober rational inspection, and ascertain the nature and value of all things around it. Indeed such a mind is not disposed to examine, with any careful minuteness, the real condition of things. It is content with ignorance, because environed with something more delicious than such knowledge, in the Paradise which imagination creates. In that Paradise it walks de-

lighted, till some imperious circumstance of real life call it thence, and it gladly escapes thither again when the avocation is past. There, every thing is beautiful and noble as could be desired to form the residence of an angel. If a tenth part of the felicities that have been enjoyed, the great actions that have been performed, the beneficent institutions that have been established, and the beautiful objects that have been seen, in that happy region, could have been imported into this terrestrial place—what a delightful thing, my dear friend, it would have been to awake each morning to see such a world once more.

It is not strange that a faculty, of which the exercise is so easy and bewitching, and the scope infinite, should obtain a predominance over understanding, especially in young persons, and in those who have been brought up, like Rasselas and his companions, in a state of seclusion from the sight and experience of the world.

Indeed a considerable vigour of imagination, though it be at the expence of a frequent predominance over juvenile understanding, seems even necessary, in early life, to cause a generous expansion of the passions by giving the most lively aspect to the objects by which they ought to be interested. It may also contribute to prepare the mind for the exercise of that faith which converses with unseen objects, but converses with them through the medium of those ideal forms in which imagination presents them, and in which only a strong imagination can present them impressively.* And I should deem it the indication of a character not des-

* The Divine Being is the only one of these objects which a christian would wish it possible to contemplate without the aid of imagination; and every reflective man has felt how difficult it is to apprehend even this object without the intervention of an image. In thinking of the transactions and personages of history, the final events of time foretold by prophecy, the state of good men in another world, the superior ranks of intelligent agents, &c. he has often had occasion to wish his imagination much more vivid.

trained to excel in the liberal, the energetic, or the devout qualities, if I observed in the youthful age a close confinement of thought to bare truth and minute accuracy, with an entire aversion to the splendours and occasional amplifications and excursions of fancy. This opinion is warranted by instances of persons so distinguished in youth, who have become subsequently very sensible indeed, but dry, cold, precise, devoted to detail, and incapable of being carried away one moment by any inspiration of the beautiful or the sublime. They seem to have only the bare intellectual stamina of the human mind, without the addition of what is to give it life and sentiment. They give one an impression similar to that made by the leafless trees which you remember our observing in winter, admirable for the distinct exhibition of their branches and minute ramifications so clearly defined on the sky, but destitute of all the green soft luxury of foliage which is requisite to make a

perfect tree. And even the affections existing in such minds seem to have a bleak abode, somewhat like those bare deserted nests which you have often seen in such trees.

If indeed the signs of this exclusive understanding indicated also such an extraordinary degree of it, as to promise a very great mathematical or metaphysical genius, one would perhaps be content to forego some of the faculties and qualities which form a complete mind, for the sake of this pre-eminence of one of its distinctions; even though the person were to be so defective in sentiment and fancy, that, like a gentleman eminent in science at the present time, he could read through a most animated epic poem, and on being asked what he thought of it, gravely reply, "What does it prove?" But the want of imagination is never an evidence, and perhaps but rarely a concomitant, of superior understanding.

Imagination may be allowed the ascen-

dency in early youth, the case should always be reversed in mature life; and if it is not, a man should consider his mind as either unfortunately constructed, or unwisely disciplined. The latter indeed is probably true in every such instance.

LETTER II.

THE ascendency of imagination operates in various modes; I will endeavour to distinguish those which may justly be called romantic.

The extravagance of imagination in romance has very much consisted in the display of a destiny and course of life totally unlike the common condition of mankind. And you may have observed in living individuals, that one of the effects sometimes produced by the predominance of this faculty is, a persuasion in a per-

son's own mind that he is born to some peculiar and extraordinary destiny, while yet there are no extraordinary indications in the person or his circumstances. There was something rational in the early presentiment which some distinguished men have entertained of their future career. When a celebrated general of the present times exclaimed, after performing the common military exercise in a company of juvenile volunteers, "I shall be a commander in chief," a sagacious observer of the signs of yet undeveloped powers, might have thought it indeed a rather sanguine, but probably would have not pronounced it an absurd anticipation. An elder and intelligent associate of Milton's youth might without much difficulty have believed himself listening to an oracle, when so powerful a genius avowed to him, that he regarded himself as destined to produce a work which should distinguish the nation and the age. The opening of uncommon faculties may be sometimes at-

tended with these anticipations, and may be allowed to express them, perhaps even, as a stimulus, encouraged to indulge them. But in most instances these magnificent presumptions form, in the observer's eye, a ludicrous contrast with the situation and powers of the person that entertains them. And in the event, how few such anticipations have proved themselves to have been the genuine promptings of an extraordinary mind !

The visionary expectation of a peculiar destiny is not confined however to prospects which imply uncommon talent ; it is often the flattering self-assurance simply of a life of singular felicity. The captive of fancy fondly imagines his prospect of life as a delicious vale, from each side of which every stream of pleasure is to flow down to his feet ; and while it cannot but be seen that innumerable evils do harass other human beings, some immortal spell is to protect him against them all. He takes no deliberate account of what is in-

evitable in the lot of humanity, of the sober probabilities of his own situation, or of those principles in the constitution of his mind which are perhaps unfavourable to happiness.

If this excessive imagination is combined with tendencies to affection, it makes a person *sentimentally* romantic. With a great, and what might, in a better endowed mind, be a just contempt of the ordinary style of attachments, both in friendship and love, he indulges a most assured confidence that his peculiar lot is to realize all the wonders of generous, virtuous, noble, unalienable friendship, and of enraptured, uninterrupted, and unextinguishable love, that fiction ever talked in her dreams; while perhaps a shrewd indifferent observer can see nothing in the nativity or character of the man, or in the qualities of the human creatures that he adores, or in the principles on which his devotion is founded, to promise an elevation or perma-

nence of felicity beyond the destiny of common mortals.

If a passion for variety and novelty accompanies this extravagant imagination, it will exclude from its bold sketches of future life every thing like confined regularity, and common plodding occupations. It will suggest that *I* was born for an adventurer, whose story will one day amaze the world. Perhaps I am to be an universal traveller; and there is not on the globe a grand city, or ruin, or volcano, or cataract, but I must see it. Debility of constitution, deficiency of means, innumerable perils, unknown languages, oppressive toils, and the shortness of life, are very possibly all left out of the account.

If there is in the disposition a love of what is called glory, and an almost religious admiration of those capacious and intrepid spirits one of which has often decided in one perilous day the destiny of armies and of empires, a predominant

Imagination may be led to revel amidst the splendours of military exploit, and to flatter the man that he too is to be a hero, a great general.

When a mind under this influence recurs to precedents as a foundation and a warrant of its expectations, they are never the usual, but always the extraordinary examples, that are contemplated. An observer of the ordinary instances of friendship is perhaps heard to assert, that the sentiment is sufficiently languid in general, to admit of an entire self-interest, of absence without pain, and of final indifference.—Well, so let it be; Damon and Pythias were friends of a different sort, and *our* friendship is to be like their's. Or if the subject of musing and hope is the union in which love commonly results, it may be true and obvious enough, that the generality of instances would not seem to tell of more than a mediocrity of happiness in this relation; but a visionary person does not live within the same world.

with these examples. The few instances which have been recorded of tender and never-dying enthusiasm; together with the numerous ones which romance and poetry have created, form the class to which he belongs, and from whose enchanting history, excepting their misfortunes, he reasons to his own future experience. So too the man, whose fancy anticipates political or martial achievement; allows his thoughts to revert continually to those names which a rare conjunction of talents and circumstances has elevated into fame; forgetting that many thousands, even of men of great ability, have died in obscurity, for want of situations in which to display themselves; and never suspecting that himself perhaps has not talents competent to any thing great, if some extraordinary event were just now to place him in the most opportune concurrence of circumstances. That there has been one very signal man to a million, gives a stronger probability that he shall be a sig-

nal man, than that there have been a million to one signal man, infers a probability of his remaining one of the multitude.

You will generally observe, that persons thus self-appointed, in either sex, to be exceptions to the usual lot of humanity, endeavour at a kind of consistency of character, by a great aversion to the common modes of action and language, and an habitual affectation of something extraordinary. They will perhaps disdain regular hours, usual dresses, and common forms of transacting business; this you are to regard as the impulse of a spirit whose high vocation requires it to renounce all signs of relation to vulgar minds.

The epithet romantic then may be justly applied to those presumptions (if entertained after the childish or very youthful age) of a peculiarly happy or important destiny in life, which are not clearly founded on certain palpable distinctions

of character or situation, or which greatly exceed the sober prognostics afforded by those distinctions.—It should be observed here that *wishes* merely do not constitute a character romantic. A person may sometimes let his mind wander into vain wishes for all the fine and strange things on earth, and yet be far too sober to expect any of them. In this case however he will often check and reproach himself for the folly of entertaining the wish.

The absurdity of such anticipations consists simply in the improbability of their being realized, and not in their objects being uncongenial with the human mind ; but another effect of the predominance of imagination may be a disposition to form schemes or indulge expectations essentially incongruous with the nature of man. Perhaps however you will say, What is that nature ? Is it not a mere passive thing, variable almost to infinity, according to climate, to institutions, and to the different ages of time ? Even taking it in a civil-

ized state, what relation is there between such a form of human nature as that displayed at Sparta, and, for instance, the modern Society of Friends, or the Moravian Fraternity? And how can we ascertain what is congenial with it or not, unless itself were first ascertained? Allow me to say, that I speak of human nature in its most general principles only, as social, self-interested, inclined to the wrong, slow to improve, passing through several states of capacity and feeling in the successive periods of life, and the few other such permanent distinctions. Any of these distinctions may vanish from the sight of a visionary mind, while forming, for itself or for others, such schemes as could have sprung only from an imagination become wayward through its excess of power. I remember, for example, a person, very young indeed, who was so enchanted with the stories of Gregory Lopez, and one or two more pious hermits, as almost to form the resolution to betake

himself to some wilderness and live as Gregory did. At any time, the very word *hermit* was enough to transport him, like the witch's broomstick, to the solitary hut, which was delightfully surrounded by shady solemn groves, mossy rocks, crystal streams, and gardens of radishes. While this fancy lasted, he forgot the most obvious of all facts, that man is not made for habitual solitude, nor can endure it without misery, except when turned into a superstitious ascetic*.

Contrary to human nature, is the proper description of those theories of education, and those flatteries of parental hope, which presume that young people in general may be matured to eminent wisdom, and adorned with the universality

* Lopez indeed was often visited by pious persons who sought his instructions; this was a great alleviation: but my hermit was fond of the idea of an uninhabited island, or of a wilderness so deep that these good people would not have been able to come at him, without a more formidable pilgrimage than was ever yet made for the sake of obtaining instruction.

of noble attainments, by the period at which in fact the intellectual faculty is but beginning to operate with any thing like clearness and force. Because some individuals, remarkable exceptions to the natural character of youth, have almost in their childhood advanced beyond the youthful giddiness, and debility of reason, and have displayed, at the age of perhaps twenty-one, a wonderful assemblage of all the strong and all the graceful endowments, it therefore only needs a proper system of education to make other young people (at least those of *my* family, the parent thinks) be no longer what nature has always made youth to be. Let this be adopted, and we shall see multitudes at that age possessing the judgment of sages, or the diversified acquirements and graces of all-accomplished gentlemen and ladies: And what, pray, are the beings which are to become, by the discipline of eight or ten years, such finished examples of various excellence? Not, surely, these boys

here, that love nothing so much as tops marbles and petty mischief—and those girls, that have yet attained but few ideas beyond the dressing of dolls? Yes, even these!

The same charge, of being unadapted to man, seems applicable to the speculations of those philosophers and philanthropists, who have eloquently displayed the happiness, and asserted the practicability, of an equality of property and modes of life throughout society. Those who really anticipated or projected the practical trial of the system, must have forgotten on what planet those apartments were built, or those arbours were growing, in which they were contemplating such visions. For in these visions they beheld the ambition of one part of the inhabitants, the craft or audacity of another, the avarice of another, the stupidity or indolence of another, and the selfishness of almost all, as mere adventitious faults, superinduced on the character of the species, and instantly

flying off at the approach of better institutions, which shall prove, to the confusion of all the calumniators of human nature, that nothing is so congenial to it as moderation and disinterestedness. However, it is but just to acknowledge, that most of them have admitted the necessity of such a grand transformation as to make man another being, previously to the adoption of the system. This is all very well: when the proper race of *men* shall come from Utopia, the system and polity may very properly come along with them; or these sketches of it, prepared for them by *us*, may be carefully preserved here, in volumes more precious than those of the Sibyls, against their arrival. Till then, the sober observers of the human character will read these beautiful theories as romances, adapted to excite sarcastic ridicule in their splenetic hours, when they are disgusted with human nature, and to produce deep melancholy in their benevolent ones, when they pity it,

It hardly needs to be said, that the character of the age of chivalry may be cited as an illustration of the same kind. One of its most prominent distinctions was, an immense incongruity with the simplest principles of human nature. For instance, in the concern of love : a generous young man became attached to an interesting young woman—interesting, that is to say, as he believed, from having once seen her ; for probably he never heard her speak. His heart would naturally prompt him to seek access to the object whose society, it told him, would make him happy ; and if in a great measure debarred from that society, he would surrender himself to the melting mood of the passion, in the musings of pensive retirement. But this was not the way. He must abandon for successive years her society and vicinity, and every soft indulgence of feeling, and rush boldly into all sorts of hardships and perils, deeming no misfortune so great as not to find constant occasions of hazarding his

life among the roughest foes, or, if he could find or fancy them, the strangest monsters; and all this, not as the alleviation of despair, but as the courtship of hope. And when he was at length betrayed to flatter himself that such a probation; through every kind of patience and danger, might entitle him to throw his trophies and himself at her imperial feet, it was very possible she might be affronted that he had presumed to be still alive. It is unnecessary to refer to the other parts of the institution of chivalry, the whole system of which would seem more adapted to any race of beings exhibited in the Arabian Nights, or to any still wilder creation of fancy, than to a community of creatures appointed to live by cultivating the soil, anxious to avoid pain and trouble, seeking the reciprocation of affection on the easiest terms, and nearest to happiness in regular pursuits and quiet domestic life.

One cannot help reflecting here, how

amazingly accommodating this human nature has been to all institutions but wise and good ones ; insomuch that an order of life and manners, formed in the wildest deviation from all plain sense and native instinct, could be practically adopted by as many as had rank and courage enough, and adored and envied by all the rest of mankind. Still, the genuine tendencies of nature have survived the strange but transient modifications of time, and remain the same after the age of chivalry is gone far toward that oblivion, to which you will not fail to wish that many other institutions might speedily follow it. Forgive the prolixity of these illustrations intended to shew, that schemes and speculations respecting the interests either of an individual or of society, which are inconsistent with the natural constitution of man, may, except where it should be reasonable to expect some supernatural intervention, be denominated romantic.

The tendency to this species of romance,

may be caused, or very greatly augmented, by an exclusive taste for what is *grand*, a disease to which some few minds are subject. They have no pleasure in contemplating the system of things as the Creator has ordered it, a combination of great and little, in which the great is much more dependent on the little, than the little on the great. They cut out the grand objects, to dispose them into a world of their own. All the images in their intellectual scene must be colossal and mountainous. They are constantly seeking what is animated into heroics, what is expanded into immensity, what is elevated above the stars. But for great empires, great battles, great enterprises, great convulsions, great geniuses, great temples, great rivers, there would be nothing worth naming in this part of the creation*. All that be-

* Just as, to employ a humble comparison, a votary of fashion, after visiting a crowded public place which happened at that time not to be graced by the presence of many people of consequence, tells you, with an affected tone, "There was not a creature there."

absurdity of imagination prevailing in the calculations of real life, you may justly apply the epithet, romantic.

Indeed a strong and habitually indulged imagination may be so absorbed in the end, if it is not a concern of absolute immediate urgency, as for a while quite to forget the process of attainment. It has incantations to dissolve the rigid laws of time and distance, and place a man in something so like the presence of his object, that he seems half to possess it; and it is hard, while occupying the verge of paradise, to be flung far back in order to find or make a path to it, with the slow and toilsome steps of reality. In the luxury of promising himself that what he wishes will by some means take place at some time, he forgets that he is advancing no nearer to it—except on the wise and patient calculation that he must, by the simple movement of growing older, be coming somewhat nearer to every event that is yet to happen to him. He is like

a traveller, who, amidst his indolent musings in some soft bower, where he has sat down to be shaded a little while from the rays of noon, falls asleep, and dreams he is in the midst of all the endearments of home, insensible that there are many hills and dales for him yet to traverse. But the traveller will awake; so too will the man of fancy, and if he has the smallest capacity of just reflection, he will regret to have wasted in reveries the time which ought to have been devoted to practical exertions.


But even though reminded of the necessity of intervening means, the man of imagination will often be tempted to violate their relation with ends, by permitting himself to dwell on those happy *casualties* which the prolific sorcery of his mind will promptly figure to him as the very things, if they would but occur, to accomplish his wishes at once, without the toil of a sober process. If they would occur—and things as strange *might* happen: he

reads in the newspapers that an estate of twenty thousand pounds per annum was lately adjudged to a man who was working on the road. He has even heard of people dreaming that in such a place something valuable was concealed; and that, on searching or digging that place, they found an old earthen pot, full of gold and silver pieces of the times of good king Charles the Martyr. Mr. B. was travelling by the mail-coach, in which he met with a most interesting young lady, whom he had never seen before; they were mutually delighted, and were married in a few weeks. Mr. C. a man of great merit in obscurity, was walking across a field when Lord D., in chace of a fox, leaped over the hedge, and fell off his horse into a ditch. Mr. C. with the utmost alacrity and kind solicitude helped his lordship out of the ditch, and recovered for him his escaped horse. The consequence was inevitable; his lordship, superior to the pride of being mortified to

have been seen in a condition so unlucky for giving the impression of nobility, commenced a friendship with Mr. C. and introduced him into honourable society and the road to fortune. A very ancient maiden lady of large fortune happening to be embarrassed in a crowd, a young clergyman offered her his arm, and politely attended her home; his attention so captivated her, that she bequeathed to him, soon after, her whole estate, though she had many poor relations.

That class of fictitious works called *novels*, though much more like real life than the romances which preceded them, (and which are now, with some alterations, partly come into vogue again,) is yet full of these lucky incidents and adventures, which are introduced as the chief means toward the ultimate success. A young man without fortune, for instance, is precluded from making his addresses to a young female in a superior situation, whom he believes not indifferent to him,

until he can approach her with such worldly advantages as it might not be imprudent or degrading for her to accept. Now how is this to be accomplished?—Why, I suppose, by the exertion of his talents in some fair and practicable department; and perhaps the lady besides will generously abdicate for his sake some of the trappings and luxuries of rank. You really suppose this is the plan? I am sorry you have so much less genius than a novel-writer. This young man has an uncle, who has been absent a long time, nobody knew where, except the young man's lucky stars. During his absence, the old uncle has gained a large fortune, with which he returns to his native land, at a time most opportune for every one, but a highwayman, who attacks him in a road through a wood, but is frightened away by the young hero, who happens to come there at the instant, to rescue and recognise his uncle, and to be in return recognised and made the heir to as many thou-



sands as the lady or her family could wish. Must not the reader think it very *likely* that *he* too has some old uncle, or acquaintance at least, returning with a ship-load of wealth from the East-Indies; and very *desirable* that the highwayman should make one such attempt more; and very *certain* that in that case he shall be there in the nick of time to catch all that fortune sends? One's indignation is excited at the immoral tendency of such lessons to young readers, who are thus taught to regard all sober regular plans for compassing an object with disgust or despondency, and to muse on improbabilities till they become foolish enough to expect them and to be melancholy when they find they may expect them in vain. It is unpardonable that these pretended instructors by example should thus explode the calculations and exertions of manly resolution, destroy the connexion between ends and means, and make the rewards of virtue so depend on chance, that if the reader does

not either regard the whole fable with contempt, or promise himself he shall receive the favours of fortune in some similar way, he must close the book with the conviction that he may hang or drown himself as soon as he pleases ; that is to say, unless he has learnt from some other source a better morality and religion than these books will ever teach him.

Another deception in respect of means, is the facility with which fancy passes along the train of them, and reckons to their ultimate effect at a glance, without resting at the successive stages, and considering the labours and hazards of the protracted process from each point to the next. If a given number of years are allowed requisite for the accomplishment of an object, the romantic mind vaults from one last day of December to another, and seizes at once the whole product of all the intermediate days, without condescending to recollect that the sun never shone yet on three hundred and sixty-five days at

once, and that they must be slowly told and laboured one by one. If a favourite plan is to be accomplished by means of a certain large amount of property, which is to be produced from what is at present a very small one, the calculations of a sanguine mind can change shillings into guineas, and guineas into hundreds of pounds, incomparably faster than, in the actual experiment, these lazy shillings can be compelled to improve themselves into guineas, and the guineas into hundreds of pounds. You remember the noble calculation of Alnaschar on his basket of earthen ware, which was so soon to obtain him the Sultan's daughter.

Where imagination is not delusive enough to embody future casualties as effective means, it may yet represent very inadequate ones as competent. In a well-balanced mind, no conception will grow into a favourite purpose, unaccompanied by a process of the understanding, deciding its practicability by an estimate of the

means; in a mind under the influence of fancy, this is a subordinate after-task. By the time that this comes to be considered, the projector is too much enamoured of an end that is deemed to be great, to abandon it because the means are suspected to belittle. But then they must cease to *appear* little; for there must be an apparent proportion between the means and the end. Well, trust the whole concern to this plastic faculty, and presently every insignificant particle of means, and every petty contrivance for their management, will swell into magnitude; pigmies and Lilliputians with their tiny arrows will soon grow up into giants wielding spears; and the diffident consciousness which was at first somewhat afraid to measure the plan against the object, will give place to a generous scorn of the timidity of doubting. The mind will most ingeniously place the apparatus between its eye and the object, and be delighted to find that the one looks as large as the other.

The consideration of the deluded calculations on the effect of insufficient means would lead to a wide variety of particulars; I will only touch slightly on a few. Various projects of a *benevolent* order would come under this charge. Did you ever listen to the discussion of plans for the civilization of barbarous nations without the intervention of conquest? I have, with interest and with despair*. That very many millions of the species should form only a brutal adjunct to civilized and enlightened man, is a melancholy thing, notwithstanding the whimsical attempts of some ingenious men to represent the state of wandering savages as preferable to every other condition of life; a state for which, no doubt, they would have been sincerely glad to abandon their fame, and indolence, and proud refinements. But where are the means to reclaim these wretched beings into the civi-

* I here place out of view that religion by which Omnipotence will at length transform the world.

lized family of man? A few examples indeed are found in history, of barbarous tribes being formed into well-ordered and considerably enlightened states by one man, who began the attempt without any power but that of persuasion. There are other instances, of the success obtained by a small combination of men employing the same means; as in the great undertaking of the Jesuits in South America. But have not these wonderful facts been far too few to be made a standard for the speculations of sober men? And have they not also come to us with too little explanation to illustrate any general principles? To me it appears extremely difficult to comprehend how the means recorded by historians to have been employed by some of the unarmed civilizers, could have produced so great an effect. In observing the half-civilized condition of a large part of the population of these more improved countries, and in reading what travellers describe of the state and dispositions of the


various orders of savages, it would seem a presumption unwarranted by any thing we ever saw of the powers of the human mind, to suppose that any man, or any ten men now on earth, if landed and left on a savage coast, would be able to transform a multitude of stupid or ferocious tribes into a community of mild intelligence and regular industry. We are therefore led to believe, that the few unaccountable instances conspicuous in the history of the world, of the success of one or a few men in this work, must have been the result of such a combination of favourable circumstances, co-operating with their genius and perseverance, as no other man can hope to experience. Such events seem like Joshua's arresting the sun and moon, things that have been done, but can be done no more. Pray, which of you, I should say, could expect to imitate with success, or indeed would think it right if he could, the deception of Manco Capac, and awe a wild multitude into order by a

commission from the sun? What would be your first expedient in the attempt to substitute that regularity and constraint which they hate, for that lawless liberty which they love? How could you reduce them to be conscious, or incite them to be proud, of those wants, for being subject to which they would regard you as their inferiors; wants of which, unless they could comprehend the refinement, they must necessarily despise the debility? By what magic are you to render visible and palpable any part of the world of science or of abstraction to beings who have hardly words to denominate even their sensations? And by what concentrated force of all kinds of magic together, that Egypt or Chaldea ever pretended, are you to introduce humanity and refinement among such creatures as the Northern Indians, described by Mr. Hearne? If an animated young philanthropist still zealously maintained that it might be done, I should be amused to think how that warm

Imagination would be quelled, if he were obliged to make the practical trial. It is easy for him to be romantic while enlivened by the intercourse of cultivated society, while reading of the contrivances and the patience of ancient legislators, or while infected with the enthusiasm of poetry. He feels as if he could be the moral conqueror of a continent. He becomes a Hercules amidst imaginary labours; he traverses untired, while in his room, wide tracts of the wilderness; he surrounds himself with savage men, without either trembling or revolting at their aspects or fierce exclamations; he makes eloquent speeches to them, though he knows not a word of their language; they listen with the deepest attention, are convinced of the necessity of adopting new habits of life, and speedily soften into humanity, and brighten into wisdom. But he would become sober enough, if compelled to travel a thousand miles through the desert, or over the snow, with some

of these subjects of his lectures and legislation ; to accompany them in a hunting excursion ; to choose in a stormy night between exposure in the open air and the smoke and grossness of their cabins ; to observe the intellectual faculty narrowed almost to a point, limited to a scanty number of the meanest class of ideas ; to find by repeated experiments that *his* kind of ideas could neither reach their understanding nor excite their curiosity ; to see the ravenous appetite of wolves succeeded for a season by a stupidity insensible even to the few interests which kindle the utmost ardour of a savage ; to witness loathsome habits occasionally diversified by abominable ceremonies ; or to be for once the spectator of some of the circumstances which accompany the wars of savages.

But there are many more familiar illustrations of the extravagant estimate of means. One is, the expectation of far too much from mere direct instruction.



This is indeed so general, that it will hardly be termed romantic, except in the most excessive instances. Observe it, however, a moment in the concern of education. Nothing seems more evident than the influence of external circumstances, distinct from the regular discipline of the parent or tutor, in forming the character of youth. And nothing seems more evident than that direct instruction, though an useful ally to the influence of these circumstances when they are auspicious, is a feeble counteractor if they are malignant. And yet this mere instruction is enough, in the account of thousands of parents, to lead the youth to wisdom and happiness; even that very youth whom the united influence of almost all things else which he is exposed to see, and hear, and participate, is drawing with the unre-laxing grasp of a fiend to destruction.

A too sanguine opinion of the efficacy of instruction, has sometimes been entertained by those who teach from the pulpit.

Till the dispensations of a better age shall be opened on the world, the measure of effect which may reasonably be expected from preaching, is to be determined by a view of the visible effects which are actually produced on congregations from week to week ; and this view is far from flattering. One might appeal to preachers in general—What striking improvements are apparent in your societies? When you inculcate charity on the Sunday, do the misers in your congregations liberally open their chests and purses to the distressed on Monday? Might I not ask as well, whether the rocks and trees really *did* move at the voice of Orpheus? After you have unveiled even the scenes of eternity to the gay and frivolous, do you find in more than some rare instances a dignified seriousness take place of their follies? What is the effect, on the elegant splendid professors of christianity, of your inculcation of that solemn interdiction of their habits, Be not conformed to this world?

Yet, notwithstanding this melancholy state of facts, some preachers, from the persuasion of a mysterious apostolic sacredness in the office, or from a vain estimate of their personal talents, or from mistaking the applause with which the preacher has been flattered, for the proof of a salutary effect on the minds of the hearers, and some from a much worthier cause, the affecting influence of sacred truth on their own minds, have been inclined to anticipate immense effects from their public ministrations. Melancthon was a romantic youth when he began to preach. He expected that all must be inevitably and immediately persuaded, when they should hear what he had to tell them. But he soon discovered, as he said, that old Adam was too hard for young Melancthon. In addition to the grand fact of the depravity of the human heart, there are so many causes operating injuriously through the week on the characters of those who form a congregation, that a thoughtful man

often feels a melancholy emotion amidst his religious addresses, from the reflection that he is making a feeble effort against a powerful evil; a single effort against a combination of evils, a temporary and transient effort against evils of continual operation, and a purely intellectual effort against evils many of which act on the senses. When the preacher considers the effect naturally resulting from the sight of so many bad examples, the communications of so many injurious acquaintances, the hearing and talking of what would be, if written, so many volumes of vanity and nonsense, the predominance of fashionable dissipation in one class, and of vulgarity in another; he must indeed imagine himself endowed with the power of a superhuman eloquence, if the instructions, expressed in an hour or two on the sabbath, and soon forgotten, as he might know, by most of his hearers, are to leave something in the mind, which shall be through the week the efficacious repellent to the

contact and contamination of all these forces of mischief. But how soon he would cease to imagine such a power in his exhortations, if the greater number of his hearers could sincerely and accurately tell him, toward the end of the week, in what degree these admonitions had affected and governed them, in opposition to their corrupt tendencies and their temptations. What would be, in the five or six days, the number of the moments and the instances in which these instructions would be proved to have been effectual, compared with the whole number of moments and circumstances to which they were justly applicable? How often, while hearing such a week's detail of the lives of a considerable proportion of a congregation, a man would have occasion to say, By whose instructions were these persons influenced *then*, in that neglect of devout exercises, that excess of levity, that waste of time, that avowed contempt of religion, that language of profaneness and imprecation,

those contrivances of selfishness, those paroxysms of passion, that study of sensuality, or that general and obdurate depravity?

But the preacher whom I deem too sanguine, may tell me, that it is not by means of any force which *he* can throw into his religious instructions, that he expects them to be efficacious, but that he believes a *divine* energy will accompany what is undoubtedly a message from heaven. I am pleased with the piety, and the sound judgment, (as I esteem it,) with which he expects the conversion of careless or hardened men from nothing *less* than the operation of a power strictly divine. But I would remind him, that the probability, at any given season, that such a power will intervene, must be in proportion to the frequency or infrequency with which its intervention is actually manifested in the general course of experience. In other words, it is in proportion to the number of happy transfor-

mations of character which we see taking place under the efficacy of religious truth.

Reformers in general are very apt to over-rate the power of the means by which their theories are to be realized. They are for ever introducing the story of Archimedes, who was to have moved the world if he could have found any second place on which to plant his engines; and imagination discloses to moral and political projectors a cloud-built and truly extramundane position, which they deem to be exactly such a convenience in their department as the mathematician, whose converse with demonstrations had saved *part* of his reason from being run away with by his fancy, confessed to be a desideratum in his. This terra firma is called the Omnipotence of Truth.

It is presumed, that truth must at length, by the force of indefatigable inquiry, become generally victorious, and that all vice, being the result of a mistaken judgment of the nature or the means of hap-

piness, must therefore accompany the exit of error. Of course, it is presumed of the present times also, or of those immediately approaching, that in every society and every mind where truth is clearly admitted, the reforms which it dictates must substantially follow. I have the most confident faith that the empire of truth, advancing under a far mightier agency than mere philosophic inquiry, is appointed to irradiate the latter ages of a dark and troubled world; and, on the strength of prophetic intimations, I anticipate its coming sooner, by at least a thousand centuries, than a disciple of that philosophy which rejects revelation, as the first proud step toward the improvement of the world, is warranted, by a view of the past and present state of mankind, to predict. The assurance from the same authority is the foundation for believing, that when that sacred empire shall overspread the world, the virtues of character will correspond to the illuminations of

understanding. But in the present state of the moral system, our expectations of the effect of truth on the far greater number of the persons who shall admit its convictions, have no right to exceed those rules of probability which are taught by facts. It would be gratifying no doubt to believe, that the several powers in the human constitution are so combined, that to gain the judgment would be to secure the whole man. And if all history, and all memory of our observation and experience, could be merged in Lethe, it might be believed, perhaps a few hours. How could an attentive observer believe it longer? Is it not obvious that very many persons, with a most absolute conviction, by their own ingenuous avowal, that one certain course of action is virtue and happiness, and another, vice and misery, do yet habitually choose the latter? It is not improbable that several millions of human beings are at this very hour thus acting in violation of the laws of goodness,

while those laws are clearly admitted, not only as impositions of moral authority, but as the vital principles of their own true self-interest*. And do not even the best men confess a fierce discord between the tendencies of their nature, and

* The criminal himself has the clearest consciousness that he violates the dictates of his judgment. How trifling is the subtilty which affects to shew that he does *not* violate them, by alleging, that every act of choice must be preceded by a determination of the judgment, and that therefore in choosing an evil, a man does at the time judge it to be on some account preferable, though he may know it to be wrong. It is not to be denied that the choice does imply such a conclusion of the judgment. But this conclusion is made according to a narrow and subordinate scale of estimating good and evil, while the mind is conscious that, judging according to a larger scale, the opposite conclusion is true. It judges a thing better for immediate pleasure, which it knows to be worse for ultimate advantage. The criminal therefore may be correctly said to act *according* to his judgment, in choosing it for present pleasure. But since it is the great office of the judgment to decide what is wisest and best *on the whole*, the man may truly be said to act *against* his judgment, who acts in opposition to the conclusions which it forms on this greater scale.

the dictates of that truth which they revere. Do they not say with St. Paul, "That which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do; to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not; the good that I would, that I do not, and the evil which I would not, that I do?"

Does not every serious self-observer recollect instances, in which a temptation, exactly addressed to his passions or his habits, has prevailed in spite of the sternest interdict of his judgment, pronounced at the very crisis? Perhaps the most awful sanctions by which the judgment can ever enforce its authority, were distinctly brought to his view at the same moment with its convictions. In the subsequent hour he had to reflect, that the ideas of God, of a future account, of a world of retribution, could not prevent him from violating his conscience. That he did not dwell deliberately on these ideas, is nothing against my argument.

It is in the nature of the passions not to permit the mind to fix strongly on those considerations which oppose and condemn them. But what greater power than this, is requisite for their fatal triumph? If the passions *can* thus prevent the mind from strongly fixing on the most awful considerations when distinctly presented, they can destroy the efficacy of that truth which presents them. Truth can do no more than discriminate the good from the evil before us, and declare the consequences of our choice. When this is inefficacious, its power has failed. And no fact can be more evident than that its power often thus fails. I should compassionate the self-complacency of the man who was not conscious he had to deplore many violations of his own clearest convictions. And in trying the efficacy of truth on others, it would be found in numberless instances, that to have informed and convinced a man, may be but little toward emancipating him from the habits which

he sincerely acknowledges to be wrong. There is then no such inviolable connexion as some men have supposed between the admission of truth, and consequent action. And therefore however great is the value of truth, the expectations that presume its omnipotence, without extraordinary intervention, are romantic delusion.

You will observe that in this case of trying the efficacy of the truth on others, I have supposed the great previous difficulty of presenting it to the understanding so luminously as to impress irresistible conviction, to be already overcome; though the experimental reformer will find this introductory work such an arduous undertaking, that he will be continually tempted to abandon it as a hopeless one.

LETTER IV.

As far as the gloomy estimate of means and of plans for the amendment of mankind may appear to involve the human administration of the religion of Christ, I am anxious not to seem to fail in justice to that religion by which I entirely believe, and rejoice to believe, that every improvement of a sublime order yet awaiting our race must be effected. And I trust I do not fail, since I keep in my mind a most clear distinction between Christianity itself as a divine thing, and the administration of it, by a system of merely human powers and means. These means are indeed of divine appointment, and to a certain extent are accompanied by a special divine agency. But this agency appears to accompany them only so far as they are successful, and stopping where the effect stops, leaves them to accom-

plish, if they can, what remains. And oh, what remains? If the general transformation of mankind into such persons as could be justly deemed true disciples of Christ, were regarded as the object of his religion, how mysteriously small a part of that object has this divine agency ever yet been exerted to accomplish! And then, the awful and immense remainder evinces the inexpressible imbecility of the means, when left to be applied as a mere human administration. I need not illustrate its incompetency by citing the vast majority, the numerous millions, of Christendom, nor the millions of even our own country, on whom this religion has no direct influence. I need not observe how many of these have heard or read the evangelic declaration ten thousand times, nor with what perfect insensibility vast numbers can receive its most luminous ideas, and most cogent enforcements, which are but like arrows meeting the shield of Ajax. Probably each religious teacher can recollect, besides his

general experience, very particular instances, in which he has set himself to exert the utmost force of his mind, in reasoning, illustration, and serious appeal, to impress some one important idea on some one class of persons to whom it was most specifically applicable, and has perceived the plainest indications, both at the instant and immediately after, that it was an attempt of the same kind as that of demolishing a tower by attacking it with pebbles. Nor do I need to observe how generally, if a momentary impression is made, it is forgotten the following hour.

A sincere disciple of christianity may with great reluctance admit the conviction of such an awful disproportion between the apparatus, if I may so express it, of the christian means, as left to be put in action by mere human energy, and the object to which they are to be applied. But how is he to avoid it? Is he in this one selected instance to reject with scorn that method of reasoning from facts, which has been

the grand instrument of ascertaining truth in other departments of inquiry? Or if he *is* to reason from a view of the world, how is his imagination (if he has taken some pains to reduce its ascendancy) to fabricate before his eyes a different world of facts from that on which he is coolly fixing his attention? If after such a cool observation of mankind, I repeat the representation made in the preceding paragraph, who is prepared to tell me that an opposite description would be the true one, and that an immense number of persons, even educated persons, do *not* receive the christian declarations with indifference, or reject them with contempt? But if the melancholy statement cannot be contradicted, by what ingenuity am I to draw from it the very same inference which every reasoner would instantly have drawn from the exactly contrary state of facts, the inference that the means are competent to produce the desired effect without extraordinary intervention? Till this ingenuity

can be attained, I am doomed to listen with a degree of wonder, when some of the believers and advocates of the gospel are avowing high anticipations of its progressive efficacy solely by means of the force which it carries as a rational address to rational creatures. I cannot help inquiring what length of time is to be allowed for the experiment which is to prove that no special divine assistance is needful? Nor can it be uncandid to ask what is the state of the experiment and the success, among those who reject every idea of such a divine influence as a tenet of miserable fanaticism. Might it not be prudent to moderate a little the expressions of contempt for the persuasion which prompts many christians to ask the special assistance of the Almighty, till the success without it shall be greater? There will be no attempt to deny that the effect of the christian means, in converting vain and wicked men, though small at best, is greater among those who implore this

agency of heaven, than among those who deny any such operation on the mind.— But surely the question respecting the actual measure of effect produced by the administration of religion, or therefore likely to be produced, till there shall be some great change in the moral economy of the world, is altogether independent of every theological system; as much so as any of the problems of science. It is a question to be decided by facts; and which no doubt the persons that I have alluded to would decide in the same manner that I have done, if it could be detached from all connexion with system and party, and left purely to the knowledge and good sense for which so many of them are distinguished.

But, when I introduced the mention of reformers and their plans, I did not refer in any view to Christianity, but to those speculations and schemes for the amendment of mankind, which anticipate their effect independently of its assistance,

some of them perhaps silently coinciding with several of its principles, while others expressly disclaim them. Unless these schemes bring with them, like spirits from Heaven, an intrinsic competence to the great operation, without being met or aided by any considerable degree of favourable disposition in the nature of the Subject, it is too probable that they will disappoint their fond projectors. I cannot help the ungracious perception, in viewing the general character of the race, that, after some allowance for what is called natural affection, and for compassionate sympathy, (an excellent principle, but extremely limited and often capricious in its operation,) the main strength of human feelings consists in the love of sensual gratification, of distinction, of power, and of money. And by what suicidal inconsistency are these principles to lend their force to accomplish the schemes of pure reason and virtue, which, they will not fail to perceive, are plotting against

them*? And if *they* have far too perfect an instinct to be trepanned into such an employment of their force, and yet are the preponderating agents in the human heart, what *other* active principles of it can the renovator of human character call to his effectual aid, against the evils which are accumulated and defended by what is at once the baser and the stronger part? Whatever principles of a better kind there may be in the nature, they can hold but a feeble and inert existence under this predominance of the worse, and could make but a faint insurrection in favour of the invading virtue. The very worst of them may indeed seem to become its allies when it happens, as it occasionally will, that the practical proceedings which reforming virtue enforces, fall in the same


* I am here reminded of the Spanish story of a village, where the devil, having made the people excessively wicked, was punished by being compelled to assume the appearance and habit of a friar, and to preach so eloquently, in spite of his internal repugnance and rage, that the inhabitants were completely reformed.

line in which these meaner principles can promote their interests. Then, and so far, an unsound coincidence may take place, and the external effect of those principles may be clad in specious appearances of virtue ; but the moment that the reforming projector summons their co-operation to a service in which they must desert their own object and their corrupt character, they will desert *him*. As long as he is condemned to depend, for the efficacy of his schemes, on the aid of so much pure propensity as he shall find in the corrupted Subject, he will be nearly in the case of a man attempting to climb a tree by laying hold, first on this side, and then on that, of some rotten twig, which still breaks off in his hand, and lets him fall among the nettles.

Look again to the state of facts. Collective man *is* human nature ; and the conduct of this assemblage, under the diversified experiments continually made on it, expresses its true character, and indicates

what may be expected from it. Now then, to what principle in human nature, as thus illustrated by trial, could you with confidence appeal in favour of any of the great objects which a benevolent man desires to see accomplished? If there were in it any one grand principle of goodness which an earnest call and a great occasion would raise into action, to assert or redeem the character of the species, one should think it would be what we call Humanity. Consider then, in this nation for instance, which extols its own generous virtues to the sky, what lively and rational appeals have been made to the whole community, respecting the slave trade, the condition of the poor, and the hateful mass of cruelty inflicted on brute animals, not to glance toward the horrid sacrifices in that temple of Moloch named honourable war, which has been kept open more than half the past century :—all these appeals substantially in vain : And why in vain? If humanity *were* a

powerful principle in the nature of the people, they would not, in contempt of knowledge, expostulation, and spectacles of misery, persist in the most enormous violations of it. Why in vain? but plainly because there is not enough of the virtue of humanity, not even in what is deemed a highly cultivated state of the human nature, to answer to the pathetic call. Or if this be not the cause, let the idolaters of human divinity call, like the worshippers of Baal, in a louder voice. Their success will too probably be the same; they will obtain no exertion of power, though they cry from morning till the setting sun. And meanwhile the observer, who foresees their disappointment, would think himself warranted, but for the melancholy feeling that the nature is his own, to mock their expectations.—You know that a multitude of exemplifications might be added. And the thought of so many great and interesting objects, relating to the human economy, as a sober appreciation of means seems to place be-



yond the reach of the moral revolutionist*, will often, if he has genuine benevolence, make him sad. He will repeat to himself, "How easy it is to conceive these inestimable improvements, and how nobly they would exalt my species; but how to work them into the actual condition of man!—Are there somewhere in possibility," he will ask, "intellectual and moral engines mighty enough to perform the great process? Where in darkness is the sacred repository in which they lie? What Marra-ton† shall explore the unknown way to it? The man who would not be glad, in exchange for the discovery of this treasury

* It is obvious that I am not supposing this moral revolutionist to be armed with any power but that of persuasion. If he were a monarch, and possessed virtue and talents equal to his power, the case would be materially different. Even then, he would accomplish but little compared with what he could imagine, and would desire; yet, to all human appearance, he might be the instrument of wonderfully changing the condition of society within his Empire. If the soul of Alfred could return to the earth!—

† Spectator, No. 36.

of powers, to shut up for ever the mines of Potosi, would deserve to be immured as the last victim of those deadly caverns."

But each speculative visionary thinks the discovery is made; and while surveying his own great magazine of expedients, consisting of Fortunatus's cap, the philosopher's stone, Aladdin's lamp, and other efficient articles, he is confident that the work may speedily be done. These powerful instruments of amelioration perhaps lose their individual names under the general denomination of Philosophy, a term that would be venerable, if it could be saved from the misfortune of being hackneyed into cant, and from the impiety of substituting its expedients in the place of divine power. But it is of little consequence what denomination the projectors assume to themselves or their schemes. It is by their fruits that we shall know them. Their work is before them; the scene of moral disorder presents to them the plagues which they are to stop, the

mountain which they are to remove, the torrent which they are to divert, the desert which they are to clothe in verdure and bloom. Let them make their experiment, and add each his page to the gloomy records in which experience condemns the folly of imagination*.

* In reading lately some part of a well-written book published a few years since, I came to the following passage, which though in connexion indeed with the subject of *elections*, expresses the author's general opinion of the state of society, and of the means of exalting it to wisdom and virtue. "The bulk of the community" begin to examine, to feel, to understand, their rights and duties. *They only require the fostering care of the Philosopher to ripen them into complete rationality*, and "furnish them with the requisites of political and moral action." Here I paused to indulge my wonder. The fostering care of the Philosopher! Why then is not the Philosopher about his business? Why does he not go and indoctrinate a company of peasants in the intervals of a ploughing or a harvest day, when he will find them far more eager for his instructions than for drink? Why does he not introduce himself among a circle of farmers, who cannot fail, as he enters, to be very judiciously discussing, with the aid of their punch and their pipes, the most refined questions respecting their rights and duties, and wanting but exactly *his aid*, instead of

All the speculations and schemes of the sanguine projectors of all ages, have left the world still a prey to infinite legions of

more punch and tobacco, to possess themselves completely of the requisites of political and moral action? The population of a manufactory, is another most promising seminary, where all the moral and intellectual endowments are so *nearly* ripe, that he will seem less to have the task of cultivating than the pleasure of reaping. Even among the company in the ale-house, though the Philosopher might at first be sorry, and might wonder, to perceive a slight merge of the moral part of the man in the sensitive, and to find in so vociferous a mood, that inquiring reason which, he had supposed, would be waiting for him with the silent anxious docility of a pupil of Pythagoras; yet he would find a most powerful predisposition to truth and virtue, and there would be every thing to hope from the accuracy of his logic, the comprehensiveness of his views, and the beauty of his moral sentiments. But perhaps it will be explained, that the Philosopher does not mean to visit all these people in person; but that having first secured the source of influence, having taken entire possession of princes, nobility, gentry, and clergy, which he expects to do in a very short time, he will manage *them* like an electrical machine, to operate on the bulk of the community. Either way the achievement will be great and admirable; the *latter* event seems to have been predicted in that sibylline sentence, "When the sky falls, we shall catch larks."

vices and miseries, an immortal band which has trampled in scorn on the monuments and the dust of the self-idolizing men who dreamed, each in his day, that they were born to chase these evils out of the earth. If these vain demigods of an hour, who trusted to change the world, and who perhaps wished to change it only to make it a temple to their fame, could be awaked from the unmarked graves into which they sunk, to look a little while round on the world for some traces of the success of their projects, would they not be eager to retire again into the chambers of death, to hide the shame of their remembered presumption? The wars and tyranny, the rancour cruelty and revenge, together with all the other unnumbered vices and crimes with which the earth is still infested, are enough, if the whole mass could be brought within the bounds of any one even the most extensive empire, to constitute its whole population literally infernals, all but their being

incarnate, and that indeed they would soon, through mutual destruction, cease to be. Hitherto the fatal cause of these evils, the corruption of the human heart, has sported with the weakness, or seduced the strength, of all human contrivances to subdue them. Nor do I perceive any signs as yet that we are commencing a better era, in which the means that have failed before, or the expedients of a new and more fortunate invention, shall become irresistible, like the sword of Michael, in our hands. The nature of man still "casts ominous conjecture on the whole success." While *that* is corrupt, it will pervert even the very schemes and operations by which the world should be improved, though their first principles were pure as heaven; and revolutions, great discoveries, augmented science, and new forms of polity, will become in *effect* what may be denominated the sublime mechanics of depravity.

LETTER V.

THIS view of moral and philosophical projects, in addition to that of the limited exertion of energy with which the Almighty has accompanied, as yet, the dispensation of the gospel, connected with the impotence of human efforts to make it efficacious where his will does not, forms a melancholy and awful account. In the hours of pensive thought, unless the serious observer can fully resign the condition of man to the infinite wisdom and goodness of his Creator, he will feel an emotion of horror, as if standing on the verge of a hideous gulf, into which almost all the possibilities, and speculations, and efforts, and hopes, relating to the best improvements of mankind, are brought down in a long abortive series by the torrent of ages, to be whelmed and lost in profound and final despair.


To an atheist of enlarged sensibility, if that were a possible character, how gloomy, beyond all power of description, must be the long review, and the undefinable prospect, of this triumph of evil, unaccompanied, as it must appear to his thoughts, by any sublime intelligent process, converting, in some manner unknown to mortals, this evil into good, either during the course or in the final result. A devout theist, when he becomes sad amidst his contemplations, recovers a solemn and submissive tranquillity, by reverting to his assurance of such a wise and omnipotent conduct. As a believer in revelation, he is additionally consoled by the assurance that not only this train of evils will be converted into good in the effect, but that the evil itself in this world will at a future period almost cease. He is persuaded that the Great Spirit, who presides over this mysterious scene, has yet an energy of operation in reserve to be unfolded on the earth, such as its inhabitants

have never, except in a few momentary glimpses, beheld; and that when his kingdom comes, those powers will be manifested, to command the chaos of turbulent and malignant elements into a new moral world.

And is it not strange, my dear friend, to observe how carefully some philosophers, who deplore the condition of the world, and profess to expect its amelioration, keep their speculations clear of every idea of Divine Interposition? No builders of houses or cities were ever more attentive to guard against the access of inundation or fire. If *He* should but touch their prospective theories of improvement, they would renounce them as defiled and fit only for vulgar fanaticism. Their system of Providence would be profaned by the intrusion of the Almighty. Man is to effect an apotheosis for himself by the hopeful process of exhausting his corruptions. And should it take all but an endless series of ages, vices, and woes,

to reach this glorious attainment, patience may sustain itself the while by the thought that when it is realized, it will be burdened with no duty of religious gratitude. No time is too long to wait, no cost too deep to incur, for the triumph of proving that we have no need of that one attribute of a Divinity, which is the strongest cause for adoring him, the benevolence that can make us happy. But even if this triumph should be found unattainable, the independence of spirit which has laboured for it, must not at last sink into piety. This afflicted world, "this poor terrestrial citadel of man," is to lock its gates, and keep its miseries, rather than admit the degradation of receiving help from God.

I wish it were not true that even men who firmly believe, as a general principle, the divine government of the world, are often betrayed into the impiety of attaching an excessive importance to human agency in its events. How easily a creature



of their own species is transformed by a sympathetic pride into a God before them! If what they deem the cause of truth and justice, advances with a splendid front of distinguished names of legislators, or patriots, or generals, it must then and must therefore triumph; such talents, accompanied by the zeal of so many faithful adherents, nothing can withstand. If these shining insects of fame are crushed, or sink into the despicable reptiles of corruption, alas, then, for the cause of truth and justice! All this while, there is no solemn reference to the "Blessed and ~~only~~ Potentate." If however the foundations of their religious faith have not been shaken, and they possess any docility to the lessons of time, they will after a while be taught to withdraw their dependence and confidence from all subordinate agents, and habitually regard the Supreme Being as the only power in the creation. It strikes me as not improbable, that the grand moral improvements of a future

age may be accomplished in a manner that shall leave nothing to man but humility and grateful adoration. His pride so obstinately ascribes to himself whatever good is effected on the globe, that perhaps the Deity will evince his own interposition, by events as obviously independent of human power as the rising of the sun. Perhaps some of them may take place in a manner but little connected even with human operation. Or if the activity of men shall be employed as the means of producing all of them, there will probably be as palpable a disproportion between the instruments and the events, as there was between the rod of Moses and the stupendous phenomena which followed its being stretched forth. No Israelite was foolish enough to ascribe to the rod the power that divided the sea; nor will any witness of the moral wonders to come attribute them to man.

I hope these extended observations will not appear like an attempt to exhibit

the whole stock of means as destitute of all value, and the industrious application of them as a labour without reward. It is not to depreciate a thing, if, in attempting to ascertain its real magnitude, it is proved to be little. It is no injustice to mechanical powers, to say that slender machines will not move rocks and massive timbers; nor to chemical ones, to assert that though an earthquake may fling a promontory from its basis, the explosion of an ounce of gunpowder will not.—Between moral powers also and the objects to which they are applied, there are eternal laws of proportion; and it would seem a most obvious principle of good sense, that an estimate moderately correct of the force of each of our means according to these laws, as far as they can be ascertained, should precede every application of them. Such an estimate has no place in a mind under the ascendancy of imagination, which, therefore, by extravagantly magnifying its means, inflates its

projects with hopes which may justly be called romantic. The best corrective of such irrational expectation is an appeal to experience. There is an immense record of experiments, which will tell the power of almost all the engines, as worked by human hands, in the whole moral magazine. And if a man expects any one of them to produce a greater effect than ever before, it must be because the talents of him that repeats the trial, transcend those of all former experimentalists, or else because the season is more auspicious.

The estimate of the power of means, obtained by the appeal to experience, is indeed most humiliating : but what then ? It is an humble thing to be a man. The feebleness of means is, in fact, the feebleness of him that employs them ; for the most inconsiderable means, when wielded by celestial powers, can produce the most stupendous effects. Till, then, the time shall arrive for us to assume a nobler rank of existence, we must be content to work

on the present level of our nature, and effect that little which we can effect ; unless it be greater magnanimity and piety to resolve that because our powers are limited to do only little things, they shall therefore, as if in revenge for such an economy, do nothing. Our means will do something ; that something is what they were meant to effect in our hands, and not that something else which we all wish they would effect, and a visionary man presumes they will.

This disproportion between the powers and means which mortals are confined to wield, and the great objects which all good men would desire to accomplish, is a part of the appointments of Him who determined all the relations in the universe ; and He will see to the consequences. For the present, he seems to say to his servants, “ Forbear to inquire why so small a part of those objects to which I have summoned your activity, is placed within the reach of your powers. Your feeble ability for ac-

tion is not accompanied by such a capacity of understanding as would be requisite to comprehend why that ability was made no greater. Even if it had been made incomparably greater, would there not still have been objects before it too vast for its operation? Must not the highest of created beings still have something in view, which they feel they can but partially accomplish till their powers are enlarged? Must there not be an end of improvement in my creation, if the powers of my creatures had become perfectly equal to the magnitude of their designs? How mean must be the spirit of that being, that would not make an effort now toward the accomplishment of something higher than he will be able to accomplish till hereafter. Because mightier labourers would have been requisite to effect all that you wish, will you therefore murmur that I have honoured you, the inferior ones, with the appointment of making a noble exertion? If there is but little power in *your* hands,

is it not because I retain the power in *mine*? Are you afraid lest that power should fail to do all things right, only because *you* are so little made its instruments? Be grateful that *all* the work is not to be done without you, and that a God employs you in that in which he also is employed. But remember that while the employment is yours, the success is altogether his; and that your diligence therefore, and not the effect which it produces, will be the test of your characters. Good men have been employed in all ages under the same economy of inadequate means, and what appeared to them inconsiderable success. Go to your labours: every sincere effort will infallibly be one step more in your own progress to a perfect state; and as to the Cause, when *I* see it necessary for a God to interpose in his own manner, I will come."

I should deem a train of observations of the melancholy hue which shades some of the latter pages of this essay, useless,

or perhaps even noxious, were I not convinced that a serious exhibition of the feebleness of human agency in relation to all great objects, might aggravate the impression, often so faint, of the absolute supremacy of God, of the total dependence of all mortal effort on him, and of the necessity of devoutly regarding his intervention at every moment. It might promote that last attainment of a zealously good man, the resignation to be as diminutive an agent as God pleases, and as unsuccessful a one. I am assured also that, in a pious mind, the humiliating estimate of means and human power, and the consequent sinking down of all lofty expectations founded on them, will leave one single mean, and that far the best of them all, to be held not only of undiminished but of more eminent value than ever was ascribed to it before. The noblest of all human means must be that which obtains the exertion of divine power. The means which, introducing no foreign agency,

are applied directly and immediately to their objects, seem to bear such a defined proportion to those objects, as to assign and limit the probable effect. This strict proportion exists no longer, and therefore the possible effects become too great for calculation, when that expedient is solemnly employed, which is appointed as the mean of engaging the divine energy to act on the object. If the only means by which Jehoshaphat sought to overcome his superior enemy, had been his troops, horses and arms, the proportion between these means and the end would have been perfectly assignable, and the probable result of the conflict a matter of ordinary calculation. But when he said "Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are unto thee," he moved (I speak it reverently) a new and infinite force to invade the host of Moab and Ammon; and the consequence displayed in their camp the difference between an irreligious leader, who could fight only with arms and on

the level of the plain, and a pious one, who could thus assault from Heaven. It may not, I own, be perfectly correct, to cite, in illustration of the efficacy of prayer, the most wonderful ancient examples. Nor is it needful, since the experience of devout and eminently rational men, in latter times, has supplied a great number of striking instances of important advantages so connected with prayer, that they deemed them the evident result of it. This experience, taken in confirmation of the assurances of the bible, warrants ample expectations of the efficacy of an earnest and habitual devotion *; provided still, as I need not remind you, that this mean be employed as the grand auxiliary of the other means, and not alone, till all the rest are exhausted or impracticable. And I am convinced that every man, who, amidst his serious projects, is apprized of

* Here I shall not be misunderstood to believe the multitude of stories which have been told by deluded fancy, or detestable imposture.

his dependence on God, as completely as that dependence is a fact, will be impelled to pray, and anxious to induce his serious friends to pray, almost every hour. He will as little, without it, promise himself any noble success, as a mariner would expect to reach a distant coast by having his sails spread in a stagnation of the air.—I have intimated my fear that it is visionary to expect an unusual success in the human administration of religion, unless there are unusual omens; now a most emphatical spirit of prayer would be such an omen; and the individual who should solemnly determine to try its last possible efficacy, might probably find himself becoming a much more prevailing agent in his little sphere. And if the whole, or the greater number, of the disciples of christianity, were, with an earnest unalterable resolution of each, to combine that Heaven should not withhold one single influence which the very utmost effort of conspiring and persevering supplication

would obtain, it would be the sign that a revolution of the world was at hand.

My dear friend, it is quite time to dismiss this whole subject; though it will probably appear to you that I have entirely lost and forgotten the very purpose for which I took it up, which certainly was to examine the correctness of some not unusual applications of the epithet Romantic. It seemed necessary, first, to describe the characteristics of that extravagance which ought to be given up to the charge, with some exemplifications. The attempt to do this, has led me into a length of detail of which I had no expectation. The intention was, next, to display and to vindicate, in an extended illustration, several schemes of life, and models of character; but I will not carry the subject any further. I shall only just specify, in concluding, two or three of those points of character, on which the censure of being romantic has improperly fallen.

One is, a disposition to take high ex-

amples for imitation. I have condemned that extravagance, which presumes on the same career of action and success that has been the destiny of some individuals so extraordinary as to be the most conspicuous phenomena of history. But this is a very different thing from the disposition to contemplate with emotion the class of men who have been illustrious for their excellence and their wisdom, to observe with deep attention the principles that animated them and the process of their attainments, and to keep them in view as the standard of character. A man may, without a presumptuous estimate of his talents, or the expectation of passing through any course of unexampled events, indulge the ambition to resemble and follow, in the essential determination of their characters, those sublime spirits who are now removed to the kingdom where they "shine as the stars for ever and ever."

A striking departure from the order of custom in that rank to which a man be-

longs, by devoting the privileges of that rank to a mode of excellence which the people who compose it, never dreamed to be a duty, will by them be denominated romantic. They will wonder why a man that ought to be just like themselves, should affect a quite different style of life, should attempt unusual plans of doing good, should distaste the society of his class, and should put himself under some extraordinary discipline of virtue, though every point of his system may be the dictate of reason and conscience.

The irreligious will apply this epithet to the determination to make, and the zeal to inculcate, great exertions and sacrifices for a purely moral ideal reward. Some gross and palpable prize is requisite to excite their energies, and therefore, self-denial repaid by conscience, beneficence without fame, and the delight of resembling the Divinity, appear very visionary felicities.

The epithet will often be applied to a

man who feels it an imperious duty to realize, as far as possible, and as soon as possible, every thing which in theory he approves and applauds. You will often hear a circle of perhaps respectable persons agreeing entirely that this one is an excellent principle of action, and that other an amiable quality, and a third a sublime excellence, who would be amazed at your fanaticism, if you were to adjure them solemnly, and say, "My friends, from this moment you are bound, from this moment we are all bound, on peril of the displeasure of God, to realize in ourselves, to the last possible extent, all that we have thus applauded." Through some fatal defect of conscience, there is a very general feeling, regarding the high order of moral and religious attainments, that though it is a glorious and happy exaltation to possess them, yet it is perfectly safe to stop contented where we are. One is confounded to hear irritable persons applauding a character of self-com-

mand, persons who trifle away their days admiring the instances of a strenuous improvement of time, rich persons praising examples of extraordinary beneficence which they know far surpass themselves, though without larger means, and all expressing their deep respect for the men who have been most eminent for devotional habits, and yet apparently with no consciousness that they are themselves placed in a solemn election of henceforth striving in earnest to exemplify this very same pitch of character, or of being condemned in the day of judgment.

Finally, in the application of this epithet, but little allowance is generally made for the very great difference between a man's entertaining high designs and hopes for himself alone, and his entertaining them relative to other persons. It may be very romantic for a man to promise himself to effect such designs upon others as it may be very reasonable to meditate for himself. If he feels the powerful ha-

bitual impulse of conviction prompting him to the highest attainments of wisdom and excellence, he may perhaps justly hope to reach them himself, though it would be most extravagant to extend the same hope to all the persons to whom he may try to impart the impulse. I specify the attainments of *wisdom* and *excellence*, because, to the distinction between the designs and hopes which a man might entertain for himself, and those which he might have respecting others, it is necessary to add a further distinction as to the nature of those which he might entertain *only* for himself. His extraordinary plans and expectations for himself might be of such a nature as to depend on other persons for their accomplishment, and might therefore be as extravagant as if other persons alone had been their object. Or, on the contrary, they may be of a kind which shall not need the co-operation of other persons, and may be realized independently of

their will. The design of acquiring immense riches, or becoming the commander of an army, or the legislator of a nation, must in its progress be dependent on other beings besides the individual, in too many thousand points for a considerate man to presume that he shall be fortunate in them all. But the schemes of eminent personal attainments, not depending in any of these ways, are romantic only when there is some fatal intellectual or moral defect in the mind itself which has adopted them.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME,



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